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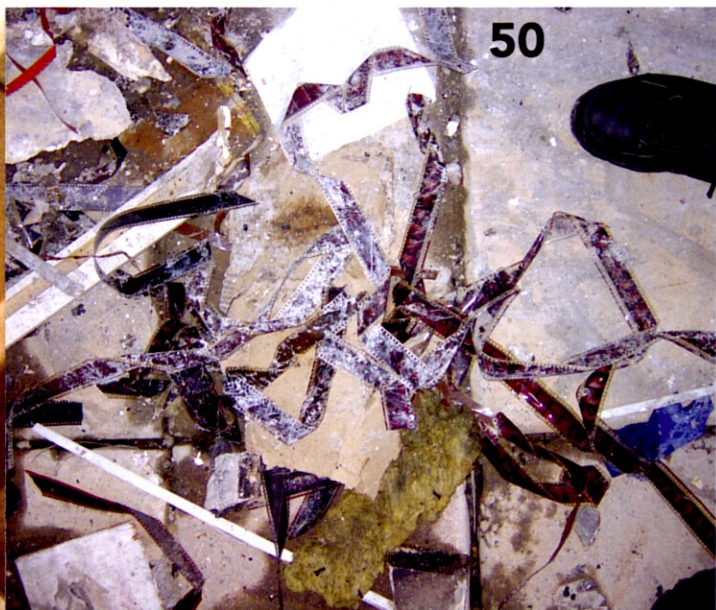
ISSUE 86 2011

**NEW CINEMA
CANADIAN FILMS
FILM FESTIVALS**

**Toronto
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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

CINEACTION ISSUE 87

Submission deadline: January 31, 2012

CLOSE READINGS

This issue continues to explore the value of close readings of films. We, as editors of this issue, are committed to the tradition of testing theoretical precepts against the practice of critical reading. This issue explores the distinction between serious criticism and the tendency today toward casual, impressionistic reviews.

Close readings presuppose that some films invite a complex response, and the practice of criticism opens up a discussion that extends the experience of viewing a film. There are directors who insist upon this kind of engagement and some films demand repeated viewing; others are geared to be taken less seriously and are intentionally undemanding.

We invite a wide range of submissions, with the intention of opening up a discussion addressing whether there remains a cultural space for criticism of this kind, or of any kind.

Edited by Florence Jacobowitz fjacob@yorku.ca and Richard Lippe rlippe@yorku.ca. Please email any questions or interest to the editors. Submissions in hard copy mailed to the editors at 40 Alexander Street, #705, Toronto Ontario, Canada M4Y 1B5. A style guide is available on our website www.cineaction.ca

CINEACTION ISSUE 88

Submission Deadline: April 15, 2012.

BEYOND THE NARRATIVE: SOCIAL ISSUES ON FILM

Recently, the theme of 'Social Issues', once relegated to the documentary, appears to be of increasing interest to fiction filmmakers; a little meaningful 'content' mixed in with the entertaining story. For the purpose of CineAction #88, we are interpreting 'Social Issues' in its broadest sense to include anything and everything to do with the state of society and social life, whether motivated by political, economic, or indeed social forces. While some directors like John Sayles and the Dardenne brothers have always focused on narratives that deal with these concerns, there seems to be a growing number of filmmakers who are tackling and/or taking on the 'bigger issues'. Examples include big budget/big star films (*Traffic*, *Syriana*, *Blood Diamond*), low budget Indies (*Martha Marcy May Marlene*, *Margin Call*), and Canadian (Philippe Falardeau's *Monsieur Lazhar* and Denis Villeneuve's *Incendies*) and European 'art films' (Kassovitz's *La Haine*, Kaurismäki's *Le Havre*, Olmi's *The Cardboard Village*). We welcome any approach to this broad theme: investigations and/or analyses of specific films, directors, topics, approaches, or theories.

BROMANCE FILMS

While this could be seen as a sub-genre of Social Issue films, it is possible to look at the genesis of this new genre in terms that extend beyond the social. A seeming extension and updating of the 'buddy film' genre, there appears to be more of interest and at stake here. It is noteworthy that in general, Bromance films are comedies, even and especially when the subject matter involves terminal cancer, as in the recent *50/50*.

Papers should be submitted in hard copy, mailed directly to Susan Morrison, the editor of this issue. Once accepted for publication, the paper will then be emailed as a file attachment. Please submit a brief proposal as early as possible as an indication of intention to submit.

A style guide is available on our website www.cineaction.ca. Please address all queries and submissions to the issue's editor: Susan Morrison, 314 Spadina Road, Toronto ON, Canada M5R 2V6 smorr@cineaction.ca

CORRECTION: As editor of issue 85, I would like to apologize for the use and mislabeling of two stills that accompanied Heather Hicks's article titled "Impalement: Race and Gender in Bryan Singer's *X-Men*". On page 54, the still identified as 'Toad/Ray Park' should be labeled 'Wade Wilson/Deadpool/Ryan Reynolds'. On page 56, the still labeled Cyclops/James Marsden should be Remy LeBeau/Gambit/Taylor Kitsch. Both of these are from *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). The error was mine alone: the author was not responsible for either misidentification. —Susan Morrison

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FRONT COVER: *The Tracey Fragments* **BACK COVER:** *Inception*

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NEW CINEMA

This issue features discussion of a wide range of new cinema. Bert Cardullo discovers the features and significance of developing new genres, with a focus on some of the most "extreme" films in recent international cinema. Henry Taylor considers narration, meaning and the changing nature of cinema in the complicated blockbuster *Inception*. *As If I Am Not There*, Irish filmmaker Juanita Wilson's adaptation of Slavenka Drakulic's novel, has been widely acclaimed. Alice Kuzniar interviews both filmmaker and novelist.

CANADIAN FILMS

A diverse group of recent Canadian films are discussed from a variety of perspectives. Alex Ginnan looks at Peter Mettler's recent *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives* on the Alberta Tar Sands in the lineage of Canadian landscape art. Amir Khan interprets *The Trotsky* in the context of Canadian politics. Patricia Gruben considers, and compares, Bruce MacDonald's *The Tracy Fragments* with the interactive multiple narratives of *Late Fragment*. Celebrated activist filmmaker John Grierson's recent work in support of the Boycott Divest Sanction movement is placed in the theoretical and aesthetic context of radical détournement by Scott MacKenzie.

FESTIVALS

Each year we feature a section devoted to reviews by our editors of new films from the Toronto International Film Festival. This year we also have reports and interviews by Allison Frank from festivals in Iceland, Latvia and Serbia.

Finally, David Cowen reviews a new book on the iconic American horror film, *The Exorcist*.

Regular readers will notice that we have changed the look of CineAction and added full colour to the cover.

—Scott Forsyth, Editor

INCEPTION, MINDBENDING,
AND COMPLEX NARRATION IN
THE SHADOW OF PHILIP K. DICK

The Junkies of Plato's Cave

by HENRY M. TAYLOR



**What's the most resilient parasite? A bacteria?
A virus? An intestinal worm?
An idea.
Resilient, highly contagious.
Once an idea's taken hold
in the brain it's almost
impossible to eradicate.
A person can cover it up,
ignore it—but it stays there.**

—*Inception* shooting script, pp. 2–3

In a world of corporate warfare and psychic espionage, Dom Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) is the premier extractor of hidden information from high-powered business “targets” whose minds he infiltrates while they are dreaming and unsuspecting, by employing with the help of his associate Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) a dream-within-a-dream strategy to access the innermost secrets. These are metaphorized as confidential documents lying in a safe. Tested and hired by the powerful Japanese magnate Mr. Saito (Ken Watanabe), Dom is lured into one last heist, a mission impossible, namely not to extract, but to perform the opposite, an “inception:” to implant—like a virus gradually penetrating through the layers of the mind to full bloom in consciousness as an original thought—the idea in the head of Saito’s main business competitor to break up his father’s monopolistic energy conglomerate. As a reward for which Dom, on the run since being charged with the murder of his wife Mal (Marion Cotillard) and haunted by her dream presence and efforts at sabotage ever since, is promised the safe return home to America, freed from all charges, and to reunite with his children.

That is the basic premise. But the plot of Christopher Nolan’s heist-action film *Inception* is so intricate that most discussions of it are bound

Paris folding in on itself in *Inception*





Promotion still from *Inception*

to just try to figure out what happens on the purely referential level of meaning, in this labyrinth of mind invasions, shared dreams within dreams, projections of deep-seated memories, and dreams as reality, almost all of it framed in flashback. One has to agree with critic Roger Ebert that the film's "story can either be told in a few sentences, or not told at all."¹ Significantly the viewer is forced to concentrate on the process of the moment by moment narration with its striking images of dream architecture of *trompe l'oeil* mazes, Euclidian space turned upside down and gravity defied, gunfights and chase scenes evocative of the Jason Bourne and James Bond films, real-time and slowed-down dream-time, and four dream levels down to "limbo," a state of "raw subconsciousness," where a few seconds of real time can last decades or even an infinity. As we descend we simultaneously go deeper in chronological reverse into Dom's past, finding out more and more about his traumatic backstory wound. Yet even at the level of limbo, which could be said to stand for the Lacanian real, there is the positivity of representation: the ocean's shore, the crumbling debris of collapsing highrises reminiscent of 9/11 and dystopian, postapocalyptic science fiction—such as *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968)—, as well as a Japanese temple by the sea. This version of the real is in contradistinction to both Freudian and Jungian thought, for which the core of the unconscious, to use this clinically more accepted term, remains fundamentally inaccessible and unrepresentable, and which is, in Lacan, nothing but a fissure or split.

Fredric Jameson has noted that the heist film is "always in one way or another an inscription of collective non-alienated work that passes the censor by way of its rewriting in terms of crime and sub-generic entertainment."² By this token *Inception*,

in its futuristic take on the genre, is at heart about meaningful human relationships and social commitment in a world of global corporations locked in economic warfare and resorting to conquer the ultimate frontier, the human mind. This is the next phase, in Marxian terms, of the real subsumption of labor: once the entire world has been horizontally (or superficially) conquered by capitalism as the prevailing mode of production, it shifts to the vertical axis of deep penetration to procure and produce the most valuable information: thoughts and emotions. Simultaneously, the desire for human bonding is the stronger the deeper we penetrate into dreamland, where dream means both what occurs during sleep and what is profoundly desired. Yet it is the instrumentalization of this desire which makes it possible to realize the heist mission's goal of "turning an emotion into a business strategy," namely leading the target Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy) from his dying father's wish for him to be his own man to splitting up the inherited business empire. This, of course, is also the very business model which cinema is based on: producing emotions which translate into profits.

The "actual" reality level in *Inception* means being located as an upmarket passenger in the mundane and socially non-committal, modern settings of transient and geographically non-specific tourist spaces, as on a high-speed train somewhere in Japan, as a first-class passenger on a Boeing 747 in flight between Sydney and Los Angeles, or inside an airport's arrival area. As is borne out by the main characters in the end conspiratorially exchanging passing glances at one another as in a peculiar kind of *déjà vu*, or, as it were, half-remembered dream, these are places where you might fleetingly fantasize about your co-travellers being secret agents, allies and enemies, just



Dreams within dreams

like in the plot of a cheap paperback which you bought at one of the airport shops to pass the time. And who is to tell who your seemingly innocuous neighbour might really be, in this age of flexible global marketplace competition? The desire to connect and bond is the more intense the deeper the film's main characters consciously move through vertical levels of lucid dreams-within-dreams. The task of implantation, however, just like the actual target, functions merely as a pretext for the total immersion of the on-screen characters in their various dream levels, and, by extension, the spectator in the film. Thus, total physical and fictional immersion actually stands for the genuine utopia of a fully *human* "immersion."

It must be pointed out, of course, that the use of the lay expression "subconscious" throughout the film signals that we're certainly not dealing with a psychoanalytic conception of dreaming, through which the unconscious can only ever be known partially and indirectly, and never in any full positivity. In Nolan's "elevator film,"³ by contrast, the Freudian interpretation of our unknown inner terrain and confrontation with an unrepresentable real is displaced by the projection of three-dimensional immersive spaces of global tourism, such as a luxury hotel, each of which a dream level embedded in a higher one. There also are, quite literally, floor levels traversed by an old rusty elevator descending into Dom's past. In reality, the lucid dreamer as extractor, just like the proverbial accidental tourist or, for that matter, metaphorically also the cinema spectator, is situated immobile in a chair and wired to a computer which generates the dream programmed with architectural mazes to be filled out by the "subject," the unsuspecting target unaware of being in a dream, and who is drugged into ever deeper dream levels. These designs, of course, are nothing

but—within the fiction's overall imaginary—stunningly spectacular simulacra on which the blockbuster narrative of *Inception* hinges and is driven by. Thus in the end, when the successful efforts of Dom are finally rewarded by him being able to return home to America as a free man and to reunite with his children, whose faces we finally see for the first time, reality itself might only be yet another dream, as is duly signposted to the audience by his "totem," a spinning top, which originally was Mal's totem: as long as it continues to spin, Dom is in a dream. The film ends on the dubious image of the totem wobbling, but still swivelling. Thus, he may be inescapably trapped and, also metaphorically, framed by the closed world of the mind, as is allegorized onscreen by enclosed spaces and images. The question is left open whether Dom, while embracing his children and facing away from his totem, himself knows he might only be dreaming, as he and his team members collectively do while switching dream levels before and during their main assignment. Thus it is the viewer who is the ultimate target of the "inception," with the gnawing suspicion taking hold that the ontological status of reality as the "highest" level within the film is itself unreliable and might have lost all external reference, leading to a self-enclosed system. But of course we are used to the fact that in mindbender cinema there cannot be an unequivocal, unambiguous happy ending in the sense of a breaking out into the freedom of an open world. We may well be stuck in Plato's cave of illusions, but unlike the classical allegory's cave dwellers—who really believe in the reality of the shadows they see—and in keeping with cynical reason, we knowingly suspect and enjoy it, as if to prolong the movie ride.

"Total immersion" originally refers to being submerged under water, as one of the rites of baptism signifying entry into

the Christian Church. In *Inception*, total immersion takes on a new reflexive quality, while still retaining the Christian link to water. On one level, the film is about the total immersion of spectator. On another, this immersion is fully present in the diegetic story-world: the protagonist at the film's beginning being washed up amid crashing waves and semi-unconscious on the beach in limbo, accompanied by Hans Zimmer's massive and dramatically enclosing score of a two-note motif; or Dom tied to a chair over a bathtub as a "kick" tips him backwards into the cold water to make him wake up from a lower dream level (this is vaguely reminiscent of the CIA's waterboarding torture methods). The dream levels in themselves are not hermetically sealed off from one another, as there is seepage between them. One closed ontological world can have effects on another. While still dreaming, Dom perceives his drop into the bathtub as spraying water shooting through the roof and walls of Saito's Japanese temple in the second sequence, as his particular reality begins to collapse. Shifts in gravity, concussions, vibrations and jolting movements of the dreamers produce and translate into lower-level disturbances. And there is, like an effective alarm clock going off, the music which simultaneously echoes through all dream levels, Edith Piaf's "Non, je ne regrette rien."

There is also, however, *seepage of ideas*. And it can be fatal, as we find out when Dom finally confesses to dream architect Ariadne (Ellen Page) his primordial crime: having performed inception on his wife Mal, namely that life in her dream, the world of limbo which for her was her and Dom's shared reality, wasn't real, by locking her totem in her safe, where it would continue to spin. The idea of the dream's unreality didn't go away, though, with Mal waking up into reality, which she now believed was still only a dream, thus fatally leading her to commit suicide, in the hope of finally waking up to genuine reality. This also raises the question of whether any of our thoughts are truly original and self-generated. Aren't all our ideas derived from somewhere else, floating around through the most variegated channels of communication, taking hold in our brains somewhere without us knowing where they came from, and suddenly appearing as if spontaneous, while in fact recalled from our pre- or unconscious somewhat like a half-remembered dream? Can we really trust our own thoughts? Thus the parental admonition of learning to "think for oneself" as part of growing up may mean realizing that we're in fact nothing but a conglomerate of received ideas. By the same token we find that *Inception* is absolutely filled with allusions to other films, a treasure trove of derivative cinema history, with every dream level almost like in a film in itself, not sequentially, but vertically aligned, so that Nolan actually gives us four films for the price of one. It's the *combination* of ideas that matters. Hence there is no copyright in simple ideas, only in David Hume's composite ideas, which are also, of course, the basic definition of fiction.

That reality and dream may ultimately be impossible to separate testifies to the film's powers in enclosing, engulfing, and overwhelming us. If every new medium initially engenders a theoretical discourse on its capacity to fully engage, envelop and immerse an audience,⁴ cinema in the last twenty years or so has been challenged by the widespread emergence of "3D computer-generated interactive environments" (virtual reality, or VR) and new digital media on the one hand, and their convergence on the other so that today film has lost cinema as its privileged site of reception, instead being able to be watched on computer screens, various platforms and social media on the

internet, on digital tv, mobile phones, and tablets, to name but the most prominent instances of such "play stations". In the last twenty or so years of this development, contemporary filmmaking has met, countered and incorporated this challenge by redefining and reemphasizing the cinema as the premiere site of a boosted physical, fictional and emotional immersion, as first indicated by 90s science fiction films as diverse as *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), *The Thirteenth Floor* (Josef Rusnak, 1999), *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999), and others. Marshall McLuhan put forward the idea that as one traditionally dominant medium comes to its historical close, it begins to let us peek into the next dominant medium following it. It is precisely at this moment that the medium explicitly is the message. So maybe *Inception's* dream levels and the characters' immersion therein can be read in yet another way as standing for our daily involvement in cyberspace. As Slavoj Žižek observes:

One cannot miss the uncanny resemblance between Leibniz's "monadology" and the emerging cyberspace community in which global harmony and solipsism strangely coexist. That is to say, does our immersion into cyberspace not go hand in hand with our reduction to a Leibnizean monad which, although "without windows" that would directly open up to external reality, mirrors in itself the entire universe? More and more, we are monads with no direct windows onto reality, interacting alone with the PC screen, encountering only the virtual simulacra, and yet immersed more than ever into the global network, synchronously communicating with the entire globe.⁵

What we have simultaneously witnessed in the last decade is the increasing spread of the "DVD-enabled film" (Thomas Elsaesser) by virtue of what has been called "forking-path narratives" (David Bordwell), "multiple draft narratives" (Edward Branigan), "puzzle films" (Warren Buckland), "mind-game films" (Elsaesser), or, finally, "complex or modular narratives" (Janet Staiger),⁶ ranging from Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) via *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) to *Oldboy* (Park Chan-wook, 2004) and beyond. And since the 90s, also, unreliable narration has made a major comeback in frequently noir-tinted science fiction cinema. So while theatrical exhibition in toto has become the crucial first-run exploitation of this newer kind of cinema, the narrative and aesthetic properties of the films in question virtually demand multiple viewings, especially being watched a second or third time on DVD or Video on Demand (VoD), which accounts for the major share of the marketing chain. With this dispersal of film across an entire range of digital viewing options, the message of the medium is to find new ways of attracting and binding viewer attention through increased and totalized immersion. *The Matrix* led the way in presenting us with the scenario of the entire world being nothing but VR, a computer program of complete reality simulation, with entire diegetic spaces and images broken down into pure strings of numbers and digital code.

In *Inception*, the process of filmic engulfment and immersion is of course allegorized by the heist crew members entering into dreams, and dreams within dreams. These purely imaginary psychic spaces, as already mentioned, are rendered as fully



Reminiscences of Kubrick's 2001

accessible, three-dimensional physical spaces. As the unsuspecting dreamer becomes aware of being in a dream, the latter's reality begins to break down, and this is presented through spectacular images of the walls of enclosed spaces quaking and threatening to collapse, penetrated by aggressive forces from without, or simply and most effectively, as all forms of material structure exploding. Instead of revealing the originary digital code they're ultimately made up of, we are presented with slow-motion images of the disintegration of all physical matter. Sitting with Dom in a Parisian bistro, Ariadne, the team's new dream architect and the film viewer's pretty "totem" that provides continuous exposition about where we are and on which level of reality, is told by Dom that one can never really remember the beginning of a dream, making her and us as spectators suddenly realize she is only dreaming, in a neat little moment of narrative unreliability revealed. As she nervously becomes aware of the lucid dream's unreality, first their table and coffee cups begin to tremble, followed by bookstalls, flower stands, windows, façades, chairs and tables and streets all around erupting and exploding, with myriad particles flying through the air in slow motion, with the two protagonists unperturbed in its midst. The spectacle uses the choreographic "bullet time" eruptions of debris, an allusion to the great foyer shootout scene in *The Matrix*—significantly a Joel Silver production which elaborates on the "flying-glass school" of shattered and blasted windows as inaugurated in the equally Silver-produced action classic *Die Hard* (1988). It's a visually beautiful and poetic moment vaguely reminiscent of the exploded consumer goods in slow-motion at the end of Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970),

and of the explosion art pioneered by Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle, as in their *Study for an End of the World No. 2* of 1962 in the desert outside Las Vegas, a performance in which they publicly detonated consumer culture's artistically reassembled detritus. Here, of course, the explosions seem completely depoliticized for purely aesthetic enjoyment, a special-effects orgy of *l'art pour l'art*.

The probably most memorable image of the entire film comes a little later, with Ariadne fully exercising her new-found powers to create reality on the go, as we see entire streets of houses rising up, Paris literally rolling back and folding in on itself, and, somewhat like a collapsible bed, forming a rooftop in lieu of the sky, with passengers and traffic continuing upside down. Traffic defying gravity is another visual *déjà vu*, recalling, among other examples, Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002), which in turn draws heavily in its cityscape architecture on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). With this spatial enclosure, gravity and Euclidian space are suspended, allowing Dom and Ariadne to walk up a street in a ninety-degree angle, not quite, but almost like Frank Poole (Gary Lockwood) jogging around the Ferris wheel structure of the spaceship in Kubrick's *2001—a Space Odyssey* (1968). Of course, there's also Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly to keep in mind, dancing up the walls. Recall that Dom and Ariadne are basically just two American tourists, sojourning in Americans' favourite foreign city by remapping it according to their own grandiosity. Isn't this precisely the effect of the imposition of US-led global capitalism—ruthlessly and irreverently turning everything upside down and completely refashioning the geopolitical and social landscape with utter

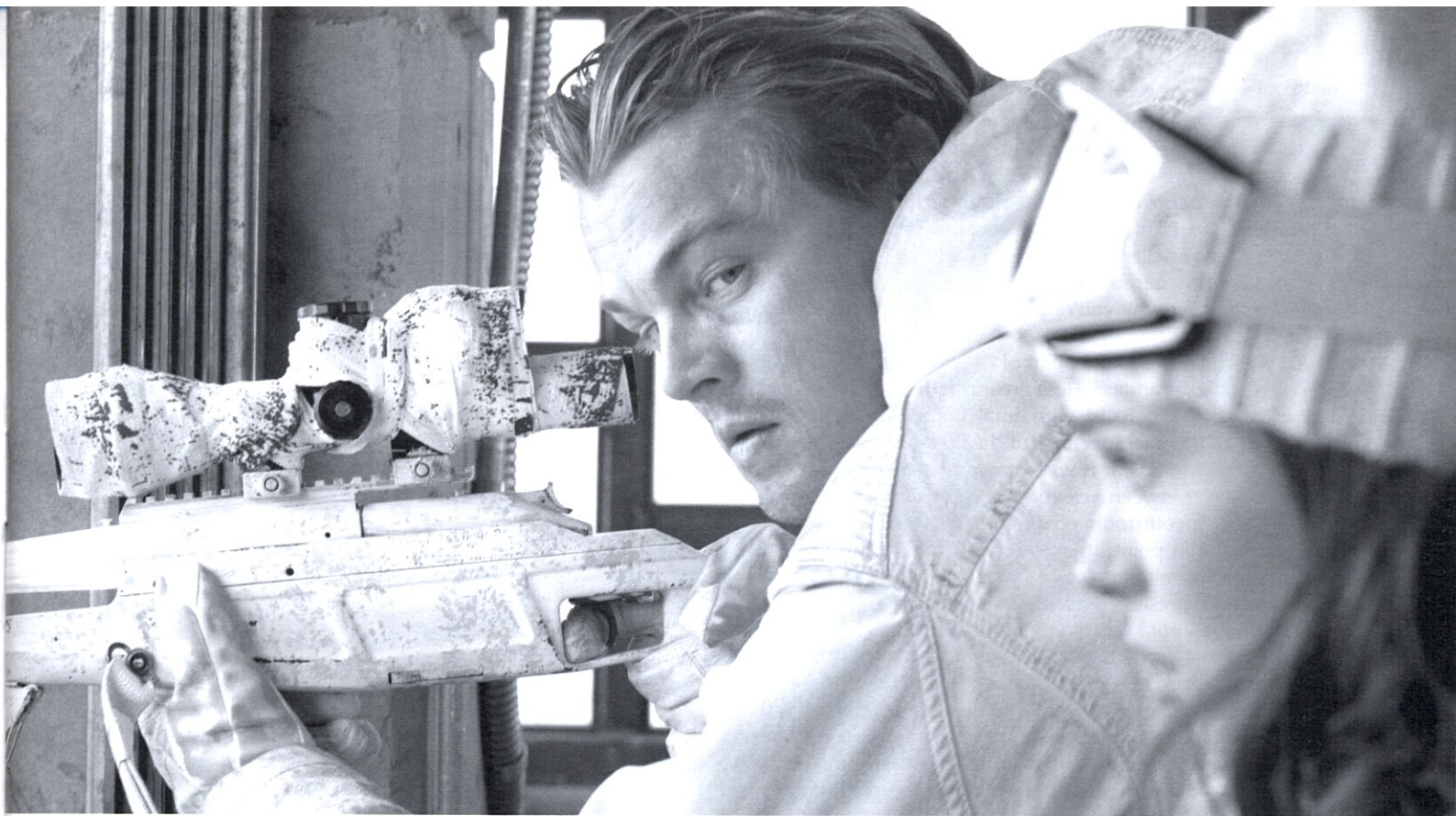
disregard for all existing local traditions and institutions?

There is an intriguing and very remarkable visual motif early on in the film, in the second sequence, when Dom and his partner Arthur try to extract vital information—a confidential, safe-kept document the content of which remains unknown to us—from their target, Saito. As Dom's dead wife Mal appears in the embedded dream, represented by an enclosed room in dark brown and amber within a Japanese temple, to sabotage the heist, Dom is forced to shoot Arthur in the head to wake him up. Thereby also destabilising the dream architecture, this is followed by a switch to the "higher" dream level of Saito's secret love nest somewhere in an unspecified Middle Eastern country. What is interesting is what we see happening there through a window outside in the streets. In a timely if coincidental anticipation of the Arab Revolution of 2011, we seem to be in the midst of a popular uprising, with an angry mob of demonstrators converging on Saito's house and setting cars on fire with petrol bombs. The situation appears very threatening and to escalate completely out of control, but as it turns out all it really signifies is that the reality of *this* upper dream level is becoming unstable, with the protesters and revolt on the streets outside nothing but a metaphorical simulation, just an immaterial image without consequence to the "real" reality, which is Dom's crew and the sleeping Saito safely located on a train in Japan. Doesn't this correspond to the way in which we experience world news on television? We see images of events happening far away in some other country, and know on one level that that's reality, but aren't genuinely affected by them, because they are simply images and in this sense not quite real. What we know about the world, we know through the mass media, as Niklas Luhmann states.⁷ Yet we consume these pictures as infotainment, somewhat cynically aware of their fabrication by the media as stereotypically newsworthy, as they ephemerally pass us by just like the landscape rushing past a high-speed train, the passengers of which indifferent and profoundly separated by an insulated window from the reality outside, which cannot make any claims of responsibility on us whatsoever.

Simulations, counterfeit worlds, the *mise-en-abyme* of worlds within worlds, parallel and disintegrating realities, programmed identities, the intricate paradoxes of time travel and invasions of one mind by another, the whole question of what is reality and what does it mean to be human—this is of course the very stuff that the stories of science fiction cult author Philip K. Dick (1928–1982) are made of. Unknown to a mass film audience prior to the first movie adaptation of his work, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982, based on the 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), over the last thirty years "PKD" has become the science fiction author most frequently adapted in film. Beyond that, contemporary cinema displays a distinct Dickian legacy. Unlike most other writers in his field, Dick is less interested in the scientific and physical verisimilitude of the architecture, machines and gadgets that his paranoid scenarios of ontological conspiracy are made up of. His arsenal of futuristic apparatuses and objects serves merely as a pretext—like the ubiquitous vidphones, the feel-good censored newspapers known as homeopapes, the flying cars called squibs or flapplies, or the colonies on Mars. There, as in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), after a postapocalyptic "Terra" has become all but inhabitable, recruited settlers use "Perky Pat" layouts to play virtual games of lovemaking with the help of the drug "Can-D" as their only solace to make life bearable. This is

before a far more potent substance, "Chew-Z," is introduced to the solar system, which turns its users into solipsistic monads whose realities are henceforth inhabited by the haunting and shapeshifting presence of the God-like and fearsome returning space-traveller Palmer Eldritch, with his victims realizing that they are continuously stuck in simulated worlds of Eldritch's making and control. This is a fantasy both as nightmarish as it is hilariously funny (as when Leo Bulero, one of the book's most colorful characters, appraises his predicament: "Jeez, he thought. I'm licked"). The whole superficial physical makeup of Dick's fictional worlds only serves to provoke into being recurring existential philosophical conundrums and paradoxes in the form of a second-order *phantomatics*, which one might say are paranoid and schizophrenic visions become real. His counter-cultural science fiction derives much of its power from a profound humanism, the fact that even in the face of reality and the known world collapsing, his protagonists—often slyly subversive mechanics, such as tire regroovers—remain basically unchanged, retaining their ordinary "Good Joe", small-business and tradesman identities. Following an observation made by Stanislaw Lem, this has led Slavoj Žižek to quip that while we may nowadays well imagine the end of the world, nonetheless somehow the free market will survive. Yet it is to Dick's credit in having precisely envisioned such a paradox, with its implicit political critique of contemporary society. The world, and reality as such, is fundamentally split.

Dick's utopian vision is perhaps nowhere more poignant than in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), a historical what-if scenario in which the Allies have lost World War II and the United States is occupied in the West by Japan and in the East by the Nazis, while there is an underground cult book in circulation which fantasizes a historical outcome in which the Allies are the victors of the war, though without this version being identical with history as we know it. It is the mild-mannered Japanese official Mr. Tagomi, who in the face of unbearable Nazi atrocities is afforded a glimpse into the possibility of an alternate and, perhaps, more humane reality. That, as Jameson has noted, "the future of Dick's novels renders our present historical by turning it into the past of a fantasized future,"⁸ is also radically evident in *Ubik* (1969), one of Dick's most celebrated novels. Set in the futuristic year 1992 and in a "North American Confederation" governed by corporations with employees who possess psychic abilities, the story begins with an expedition to the moon by a group of agents of Glen Runciter's "prudence organization" to protect a client's lunar installations from a rival company's "telepaths." The mission turns out to be a trap and Runciter is apparently killed in a bomb explosion. As protagonist Joe Chip and his fellow psychics return to Earth with their boss in cryonic or "cold-pack" storage, they start experiencing strange shifts in reality, as Runciter's face appears on coins and they receive cryptic messages from their deceased boss in writing and on tv. It now seems that Runciter is in fact alive, while it was the group that was killed on the moon and is itself stored in the suspended animation of half-life. As the present and all its material objects curiously begin to revert back in time to the year 1939, only the mysterious, commercially advertised and universally applicable spray can "Ubik"—derived from "ubiquitous," it is both the ultimate consumer product and the principle of the divine—can prevent the deterioration of reality and the irretrievable deaths of the group members. However, in the living world, Runciter suddenly encounters coins depicting Joe Chip's face on it. As the novel ends, he suspects that this is "just



Approaching the innermost secret

the beginning." We are left with the undecidability over which reality is "really real" or whether there are parallel worlds existing simultaneously.

The majority of Dick adaptations stem from his short stories rather than his novels, and have mostly been disappointing, due to their superficial treatment of the story material, with the main exceptions to date probably being *Blade Runner*, *Minority Report* and the independently produced *A Scanner Darkly* (Richard Linklater, 2006), the latter using the animation technique of rotoscoping in postproduction to capture the novel's sense of a drug-induced unreliable and shapeshifting reality.⁹ The most recent PKD adaptation, George Nolfi's phantastic romance *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), is again derived from an early short story, "Adjustment Team," first published in 1954. In many ways more interesting, however, are a host of films indicative of and displaying the Dickian universe *in spirit*: Peter Weir's media satire on 24/7 live tv, *The Truman Show* (1998), but also *The Matrix*, bear strong resemblances to Dick's novel *Time Out of Joint* (1959), with the protagonists in all three works discovering that they have been living in fabricated worlds controlled from without. *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993) and *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995)—although the latter is directly inspired by Chris Markers experimental short *La Jetée* (1962)—feature Dickian time-loop and time-travel concerns; while Vincenzo Natali's identity-switching sci-fi thriller *Cypher* (2002) has been described as "the finest screen adaptation of a story never written by Philip K. Dick;"¹⁰ finally, both *Abre los ojos/Open Your Eyes* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1997) and its remake, *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001), as well as Michel Gondry's phantastic romance from a script by Charlie Kaufman, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), are either unofficially based on—as in the former instance—or else indirectly influenced by *Ubik* and its effect of a disintegrating present reality.

Kaufman's directorial debut, *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), about a convoluted *mise-en-abîme* of life and theater can be added to the growing list of films with a Dickian point of reference, which last but not least also includes the work under consideration here, *Inception*.¹¹

It is instructive in this context to consider the classical narratological distinction between narration, plot, and story. While Dickian plots—their actual arrangement of story events—appear fairly straightforward and simple, the philosophical implications of his stories as chronologically linear and causal narratives tend to be complex. But we are still led by the narration to construct a story. By comparison, in contemporary complex film narratives we find the opposite tendency toward, on the one hand, basically simple, generically stereotypical stories with, however, complicated plots: once we have figured out the serialized algorithm of *Memento's* alternating reverse (color) and forward (black and white) movement, the film reveals itself to be simply a story of revenge, which, as the final twist implies, could go on forever (in keeping with the concept of the DVD-enabled film). On the other hand, we observe that some narratives disallow the construction of any coherent story altogether, where we remain stuck at the level of plot in all its vexing complexity, as in *Abre los ojos/Open Your Eyes*. Just as Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) in *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002) realizes that having written himself into his own screenplay makes him into Ouroboros, the mythological snake eating its own tail, we are here dealing with a tendency of contemporary film narrative to vampirize itself, to take itself as its own object and to diegeticize its reflexivity in forms of *mise-en-abîme*. The shift from the modernist dominant of epistemology to the postmodernist dominant of ontology,¹² from realism to constructivism, or from objectivity to subjectivity, is accompanied by a change from open to closed worlds in which external reference is lost

and narratives become self-referential. Hence what *Memento* is really about is cinematic storytelling and the process of watching a movie. The self-referentiality is perhaps best exemplified by Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, where the naive security guard and computer nerd Ted Pikul (Jude Law) asks the celebrated game-pod designer Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), what the purpose of the virtual-reality game is they're playing. "You have to play the game to find out why you're playing the game," is her tellingly cryptic answer.

This is arguably also the point of *Inception*, its teleological heist storyline notwithstanding. Here dreams as the definition of closed worlds go hand in hand with total immersion and the overwhelming audiovisual spectacle of the contemporary blockbuster movie. In narratology, it is well-known that there are fundamental differences between screen time, plot time, and story time. Sidney Lumet's courtroom chamber drama *12 Angry Men* (1957) is a good case in point: its screen time, the time of its narration to unfold, is 96 minutes (at 24 frames per second). Its plot time of on-screen represented action takes place during a single day, in which one juror (Henry Fonda) is skeptical of the guilt of a young Hispanic accused of murder and tries to persuade his fellow jurors to share his point of view; while the story time evoked in the heated deliberations through dialogue and referring to off-screen events covers weeks, even months. There is a parallel here to *Inception*. As the "subconscious" works faster than waking consciousness, and five minutes in reality are multiplied times twenty one dream down, and again by that amount for each successively deeper level, the actual heist with its four ontological dream worlds allegorizes filmic storytelling through the different narrative speeds and layers of time in a vertical and hence simultaneous arrangement. It is in this self-referential sense that *Inception* provides a new twist on the age-old metaphor of film as dream.

Notes

- 1 Roger Ebert: "Inception," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 14, 2010.
- 2 Fredric Jameson: *The Geopolitical Aesthetic. Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 14–15.
- 3 See Murray Pomerance: "Neither Here Nor There. *eXistenZ* as 'Elevator Film'". In: *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 20(1), 2003, pp. 1–14.
- 4 See Jörg Schweinitz: "Totale Immersion und die Utopien von der virtuellen Realität. Ein Mediengründungsmythos zwischen Kino und Computerspiel". In: Britta Neitzel, Rolf F. Nohr (eds.): *Das Spiel mit dem Medium. Partizipation—Immersion—Interaktion*. Marburg: Schüren, pp. 136–153, especially pp. 136–141.
- 5 Slavoj Žižek: *How to Read Lacan*. London: Granta, 2006, p. 55.
- 6 For an overview of these different approaches to complex storytelling in film, see Charles Ramirez Berg: "A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films. Classifying the 'Tarantino Effect.'" In: *Film Criticism* 31(1-2), 2006, pp. 5–60; and Jan Simons: "Complex Narratives." In: *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 6(2), August 2008, pp. 111–126.
- 7 See Niklas Luhmann: *Die Realität der Massenmedien*. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004, p. 9. First published 1996.
- 8 Fredric Jameson: "Philip K. Dick, In Memoriam." In: *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire for Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005, p. 345.
- 9 Among other adaptations are, in chronological order, *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), *Screamers* (Christian Duguay, 1995), *Impostor* (Gary Fleder, 2001), *Paycheck* (John Woo, 2003), and *Next* (Lee Tamahori, 2007).
- 10 Mark Kermode: "Reality Check. Mark Kermode on a Sci-Fi Adaptation of a Story Philip K. Dick Never Got Round to Writing." In: *New Statesman*, vol. 132, 25th August 2003 (<http://www.newstatesman.com/200308250026>) (19/04/2011).
- 11 Other examples to be mentioned in this context are *Gattaca* (Andrew Niccol, 1997), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998), *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999, based on a Charlie Kaufman script), *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002, based on a script by Charlie Kaufman), and *Spider* (David Cronenberg, 2002).
- 12 See Brian McHale: *Postmodernist Fiction*. Reprint. London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 3–25.





From Recoil to Ruination

PETROPOLIS AND THE FUTURE OF THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE

by ALEXANDER GINNAN

The war against Nature assumed that Nature was hostile to begin with; man could fight and lose, or he could fight and win. If he won he would be rewarded; he could conquer and enslave Nature, and, in practical terms, exploit her resources. But it is increasingly obvious to some writers that man is now more destructive towards Nature than Nature can be towards man; and, furthermore, that the destruction of Nature is equivalent to self-destruction on the part of man.¹

—Margaret Atwood



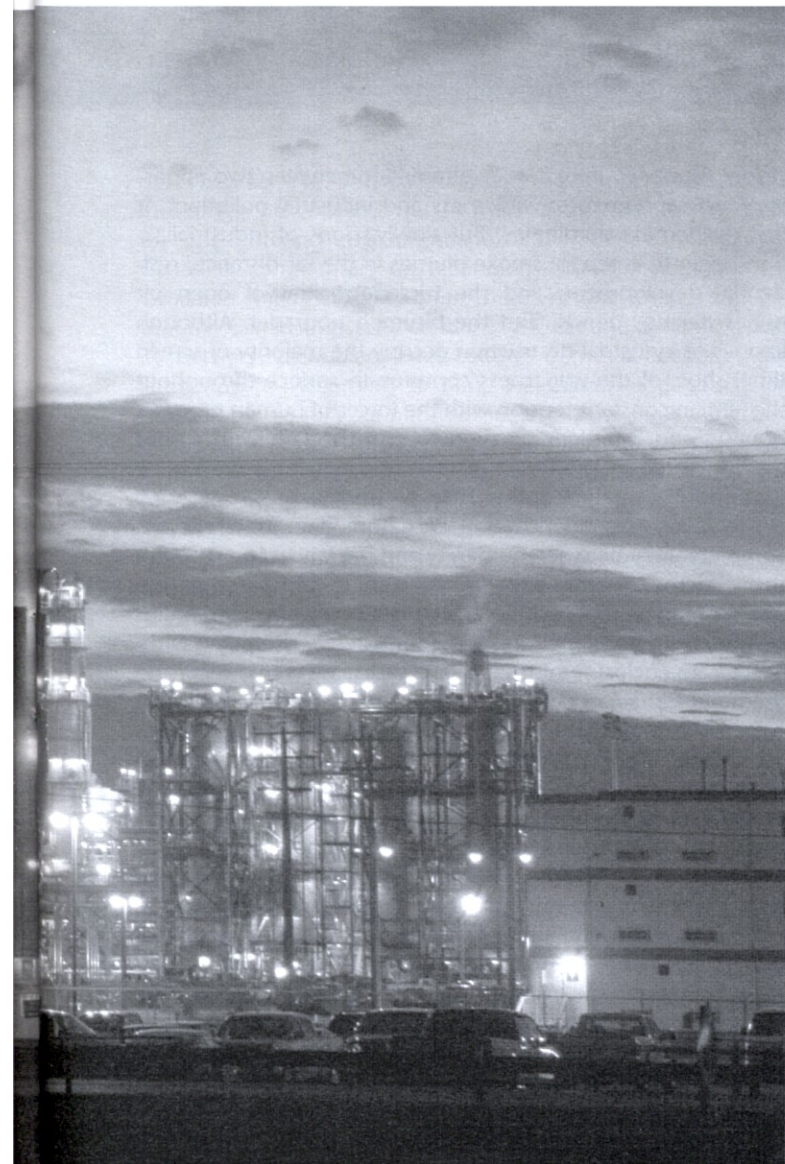
In order to posit some ideas about the future of Canadian cinema, I will focus on a primary motif in much of this nation's expressive arts: the landscape. From the paintings of the Group of Seven to the poetry of E.J. Pratt, the landscape has served as a powerful determinant of a Canadian sensibility. As Bart Testa demonstrates in his book *Spirit in the Landscape* (1989), there is even a landscape tradition in Canadian cinema, consisting of experimental films by David Rimmer, Rick Hancox, Jim Anderson, Raphael Bendahan, Joyce Wieland, Jack Chambers, Michael Snow, Richard Kerr, Barbara Sternberg, and Bruce Elder.² The predominance of the landscape as subject matter in Canadian art is related to a number of other tendencies such as realism, and particular attitudes towards nature and technology. In the ensuing study, I examine these themes in relation to Peter Mettler's documentary *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* (2009). Although the subject of landscape may have receded from more recent discussions on Canadian cinema³, I argue that it remains an important aspect of contemporary Canadian art and consciousness. Like the Canadian landscape cinema discussed by Testa, Mettler's film eschews characterization and plot in favor of an aesthetic more akin to painting. At the same time, *Petropolis* displays formal features distinct from the previous generations of landscape cinema, and points to new questions regarding environmental concern. It is these elements that bare insight to some possible futures of Canadian cinema.

In *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*, R. Bruce Elder notes that Canadian art has tended to take on a realistic and often documentary character.⁴ According to him, one of the primary factors in the constitution of this tendency has been the Canadian landscape. The feeling that the harshness of the landscape and climate was unknowable led to the development of a dualistic view of reality, consisting of a rupture between human consciousness and nature.⁵ For Elder, a realistic image can reconcile the conflict between the mental and physical, as long as the accuracy of the representation of nature allows for human expression.⁶ Although he acknowledges that every medium can achieve a harmony between accuracy and expression, he regards photography to be the best suited for representing the landscape and the anxiety it causes, as the mechanical recording process produces a high degree of accuracy, while formal and stylistic choices can allow for ample expression.

Whereas Mettler's forty-three minute documentary is comprised almost entirely of mobile aerial footage of the Athabasca oil reserves and the surrounding area, the film achieves a symbiosis between accuracy and expression through balancing content and form in its representation of the blighted landscape. The film begins with an inter-title instructing the viewer about the oil operations and its environmental implications. The text states that the ancient plant life compressing underneath the boreal forest in northern Canada is now the second largest oil reserve in the world. Known as the "tar sands," this dirty mixture of sand and bitumen (a heavy crude oil) is mined in open pits or extracted through injecting superheated water underground. Not only is the project on its way to industrializing an area of forest the size of England, everyday the oil operations release the same amount of carbon dioxide as all the cars in Canada.

These harrowing textual insights are matched with images of a topography marred by open pit mining, fields of oily sludge known as tailings ponds, and the smokestacks and fumes of the bitumen upgrader. Whereas some of the on-screen text about the fate of the Canadian landscape is only speculation, none of the represented activities are staged—it is all business as usual as seen from the sky. The entire landscape is real, and so is the devastation. Often the camera will begin with an aerial medium long shot of a truck, or a person positioned in the centre of the frame, only to pull back to such a degree that the object on screen disappears into the vastness of the landscape. It is in these sequences that the viewer realizes the scale of the reality being represented.

However, the frequent use of vertical angle (straight-down) aerial cinematography adds an expressive dimension to the documentary footage. The oil operations are shot and edited in a manner that often presents homogenous fields of texture and color, rather than recognizable images of resource extraction, processing, and byproduct disposal. Though the footage is an accurate representation, the horror of the environmental devastation is assuaged by the distanced aerial perspective. In a five minute long take sequence, the camera slowly hovers over the vein-like patterns of the tailings ponds, but without any trucks or other identifiable objects in the frame, the content of the image is indiscernible. In another sequence, the camera focuses on a rotating digger, mimicking its slow turning movement. The mechanical precision of the cinematography produces a hypnotic visual spectacle that detracts attention from the destruction of the landscape. Moreover, viewers are spared the



smell of the toxic fumes, and they do not hear the noise of the industrial operations. The latter is replaced by a benign ambient soundtrack, which also masks the sound of the fuel driven helicopter facilitating the aerial perspective.

In other words, *Petropolis* presents a somewhat ambiguous representation of the oil operations. Though the film by no means celebrates the environmental pollution, the haunting beauty of the images can hardly be taken as an outright condemnation either. While the film project is sponsored by Greenpeace, Mettler chooses not to engage many of the issues that are causing concern among environmentalists. As Andrew Nikiforuk explains, the processing of one barrel of bitumen requires the consumption of three barrels of fresh water from the Athabasca River.⁷ Ninety per cent of this water turns into tailings ponds, which leak into groundwater and produce rare cancers for the people in the downstream community of Fort Chipewyan.⁸ Whereas Mettler includes ample footage of the Athabasca River and tailings ponds, there is never any mention of this problem. The special features section of the *Petropolis* DVD includes a set of interviews with local residents, environmentalists, and academics who speak frankly about the implications of the tar sands project. Since these are kept separate from the main feature, Mettler's film invites viewers to meditate on the situation in a manner that differs from conventional (didactic) methods of engaging environmental concern.

Technology and the Canadian Landscape

In a monologue near the end of the film, Mettler states that the aerial view offers "a new perspective of a landscape that cannot be comprehended from the ground." This incomprehensibility is similar to the incompatibility between consciousness and nature described by Elder, but there is a major difference. The landscape Mettler refers to is not the harsh Canadian wilderness, but rather a landscape blighted by technology and greed. At the same time, Elder notes that devastated landscapes are an important aspect of the Canadian discourse on art:

Many Canadian thinkers and artists have viewed [the] enterprise of creating an intimate relationship with nature as a battle we are destined to lose. They have recognized that nature is in the process of vanishing, of being displaced by technology...Much of Canadian art and Canadian thought, therefore, is devoted to a last-ditch effort to establish a satisfactory relationship with nature, a force that humanizes people by making them aware of their mortality, their brutality and their tenderness.⁹

Thus, expressions of environmental concern are nothing new to Canadian landscape art. Elder refers to the paintings of Tom Thompson of the Group of Seven, specifically his trio of works: *Abandoned Logs* (1915); *Burnt Land* (undated); and *New Life After Hope*. For him, these paintings convey Thompson's disgust towards the effects of technology on the forests of northern Ontario, and the increasing terror he felt about where technology was leading Canadians.¹⁰ According to Elder, "a tragic vision" lies at the core of Canadian culture because nature—a fundamental necessity for humans to be fully humanized—is being eclipsed by technology.¹¹

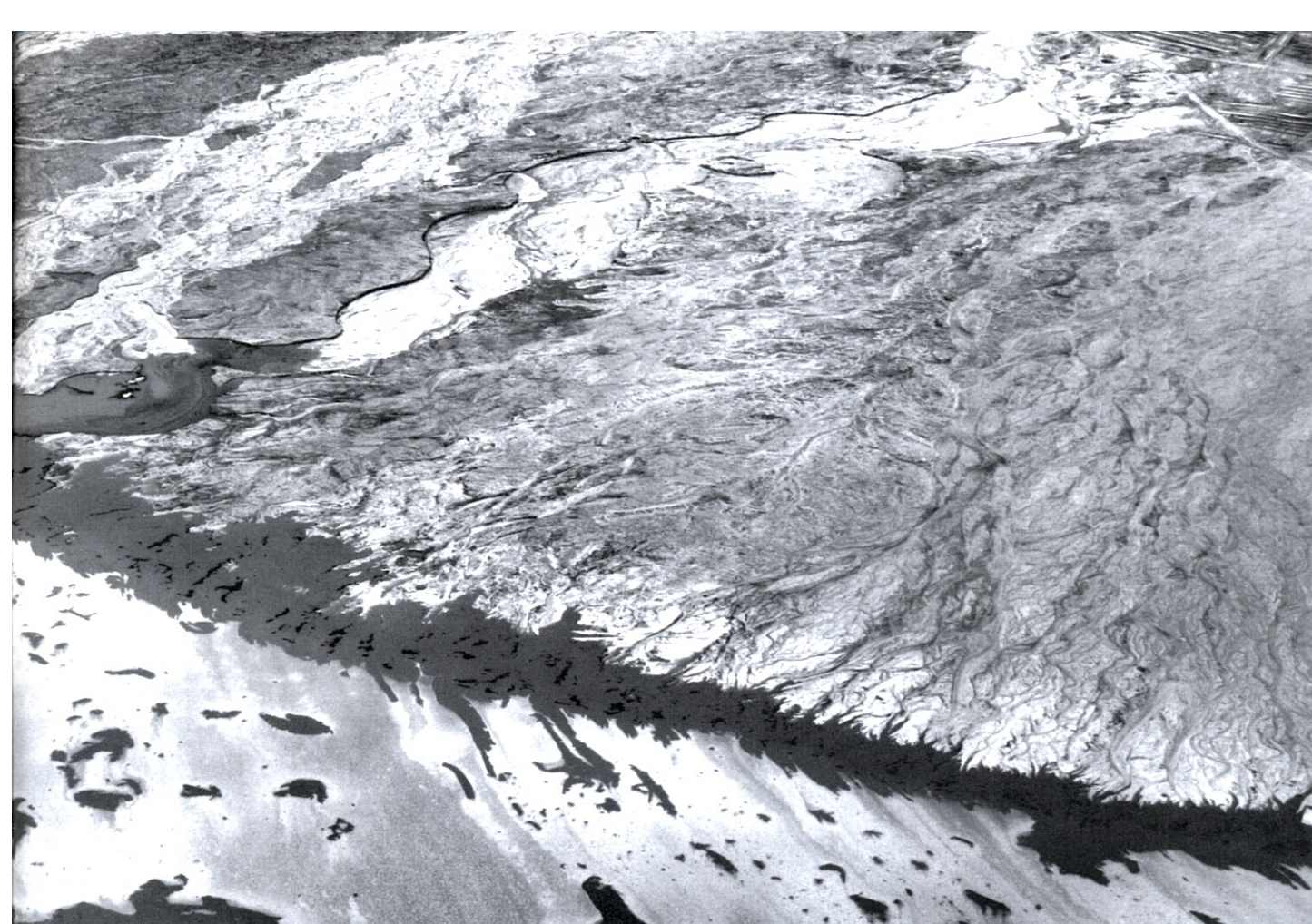
Despite the abundant images of sheer environmental devastation, Mettler's film does not fully submit to this tragic



vision. *Petropolis* unfolds as an alternation between two opposing landscape images: wilderness and industrial pollution. At first, wilderness dominates. But slowly, signs of industrialization begin to creep in: smoke plumes in the far distance; residential development; and the triple atrocities of open pit mines, tailings ponds, and the bitumen upgrader. Although images of industrial destruction occupy the majority of screen time, shots of the wilderness continue to surface throughout the film, in constant tension with the forces of human progress gone wrong. Mettler's decision to end the film with a shot moving through the forest in reverse urges for a worldview that prioritizes nature, rather than destructive progress.

However, this prioritization of nature does not reflect a complete unity between humanity and the landscape. Though the wilderness hardly appears threatening compared to the images of industrial pollution, Mettler's point of view remains isolated from both environments, consistently protected within the safe enclosure of the helicopter. In line with a recurring theme in Canadian culture, the helicopter seems to be a sort of garrison that shields the director from both the landscapes of wilderness and pollution. As Testa explains, the Canadian (he is referring to the English speaking settler society) response to the landscape engendered a particular cast of mind which Northrop Frye theorized as "the garrison mentality".¹² According to Frye, the Canadian experience consists of two spaces: the landscape with its inhuman scale and threatening otherness, and a safe interior space carved out for the sake of human survival.¹³

At the same time, Mettler's reliance on the helicopter does not necessarily reflect the total recoil from the landscape



The haunting beauty of the tailings ponds.

described by Frye. The act of filming the oil operations from a fuel driven helicopter is not so much a contradictory method for encountering the landscape, but rather a particularly Canadian commentary on technology. In *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant*, Arthur Kroker explains that the Canadian psyche contains "a great and dynamic polarity between technology and culture, between economy and landscape".¹⁴ According to him, the Canadian discourse on technology is fully implicated in the power of American empire, but it also threatens to exterminate any indigenous, popular culture, in Quebec or English-Canada.¹⁵ As a result, the Canadian mind seeks to preserve, if only in memory, those valuable aspects of experience which have been obliterated by the technology; or, alternatively, to emancipate technology from within by rethinking its significance.¹⁶

The non-didactic representation of environmental pollution in *Petropolis* conveys the paradoxical nature of the Canadian discourse on technology. While the avoidance of obvious shadows of the helicopter, and the masking of the sounds of its motorization may initially come across as an effort to conceal the method of filming, by the end of the film, the mechanized gyroscopic movements of the camera are made emphatic, as if to lay bare the technology that enables the encounter with the landscape. Whereas the oil operations are a sign of Canada's industrial and technological development, Mettler's film is never a one-sided celebration or condemnation of technology. As a work of contemporary cinema, *Petropolis* revisits many of the principle themes of Canadian art. This is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of its treatment of the tar sands situation, since the oil operations are a global concern. Not only is the

overall project financed by France, Norway, China, Japan, the Middle East, and the United States, the labor force is also global in scope, with people arriving from China, Mexico, Hungary, India, Romania, Atlantic Canada, and beyond.¹⁷ In spite of these transnational connections, Mettler chooses to focus on the Canadian side of the equation. The fact that a filmmaker can still engage the theme of the landscape and the concerns of technology in a distinctly Canadian context leaves hope for a future of a Canadian cinema in this age of globalization.

Notes

- 1 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 2004, 73.
- 2 Bart Testa, *Spirit in the Landscape*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989. This was the accompanying catalog for a film program of the same title which was held at the Art Gallery of Ontario from March 28–April 24, 1989.
- 3 I am thinking about books such as Christopher Gittings' *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference, and Representation*. New York: Routledge, 2002, and George Melnyk's *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- 4 R. Bruce Elder, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1989, 1.
- 5 Ibid, 29.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2010, 3.
- 8 Ibid, 3.
- 9 Elder, 34–35.
- 10 Ibid, 35.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Testa, 1.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant*. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1983, 8.
- 15 Ibid, 12.
- 16 Ibid, 13.
- 17 Nikiforuk, 23.

**"I leave to several futures
(not to all)
my garden of forking paths"**

PROTO-INTERACTIVITY IN
LATE FRAGMENT AND *THE TRACEY FRAGMENTS*

by PATRICIA GRUBEN



At the Toronto Film Festival in 2007, two Canadian feature films with similar titles were shown, two days apart—one in a conventional cinema, the other in a packed screening room with a VJ running the action. Together they present a fascinating contrast in the current debate around interactive narrative, though neither is fully interactive in itself. *The Tracey Fragments* has a pre-determined structure, yet its use of split-screen imagery amounts to a kind of proto-interactivity. *Late Fragments* consists of three loosely related subplots over which the DVD-viewer has some control by clicking on a mouse.

Both of these films are based on principles of melodrama, yet use new digital tools to offer us virtual worlds beyond the conventions of traditional narrative. Both are symptomatic of the increasing artifice of cinema through digital technology, a network of images in constant (or potential) flux, no longer enclosed within a single frame. The split screen in *The Tracey Fragments* gives us a visual mosaic from which each audience member constructs a personal *mise-en-scène*; the database of scenes in *Late Fragment* grants the viewer more conscious control through choosing to shift from one scene to another. However neither of these films is interactive to the degree that the viewer determines the outcome of the plot as in a 'choose your own adventure' game. In both, the familiar tropes of empathetic engagement are inflected by formal strategies which may either reinforce or undermine the integrity of our perceptual experience. Looking more closely at the structure and reception of these two films will give us deeper insight into the potential—and the challenges—of non-linear narrative.

Classical narrative encourages immersive participation by creating characters that we can empathize with by identifying with their desires and their vulnerability. The physical or emotional jeopardy of these characters is developed through a set of causal relationships that build a dramatic arc—not a database of unstructured information, but a strategic plotting. The ongoing debate over narrative design in interactive forms hinges on the question of viewer immersion in a game, a puzzle, or a story.

If a satisfying experience of narrative requires a willing suspension of disbelief—or as Janet Murray calls it, "active creation of belief"¹—then how can this be reconciled with the evaluation and decision-making process which pulls us out of immersion in the fictional world to click a mouse, press a button, or touch a screen? On the other hand, how can we engage in interactive play under any illusion that we are really authors of the story/game, knowing the framework has been designed with limits on our choices—unlike Borges's famous Garden of Forking Paths in which all possibilities are present? What role do the benchmarks of Aristotelian narrative—character empathy, conflict and rising action, dramatic resolution—play in our navigation of these new worlds in which time and space are fractured? How does each address the dialectic between haptic immersion and cognitive choice? How are attraction and spectacle reconciled with drama?

At one end of the debate, Lev Manovich argues that because narrative is based on authorial control in contrast to the neutrality of database options, then interactivity and narrative are "natural enemies" serving opposing purposes.²

Nitzan Ben-Shaul agrees that the multi-tasking of interactive engagement hinders the participant's immersion in dramatic narrative, demanding that the viewer/player "be equally attentive to a flow of several audio-visual occurrences unrelated in space and non-consecutive in time."³ In contrast, Janet Murray claims that interactive engagement is different but equal:

Because of our desire to experience immersion, we focus our attention on the enveloping world and we use our intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience.⁴

Marsha Kinder argues that web-based media will generate new forms of perception. Rather than splitting our focus, interaction will deepen our involvement by giving us the best of every-

The Tracey Fragments: Tracey (Ellen Page) tells her story from the back of the bus.



The Tracey Fragments: A moment of delusional happiness heightened by multiple images

thing—the empathic causality of narrative, the spectacle of attraction, and the active pleasures of gaming, all at the same time. In any case, she writes, “all narratives are constructed by selecting from databases,” and “despite the cyber-structuralist dream of totality” (as in Borges’s labyrinth), database material is invariably selected. Thus “as soon as the database categories are determined and the task of what to retrieve defined, one is launched on a narrative quest with motives and consequences.”⁵

Split-Screen Immersion: *The Tracey Fragments*

Manovich notes that as cinema developed from its primitive beginnings, its camerawork and editing became more fluid, and consequently more immersive. Although we spectators (usually) remain in our seats, our eyes—and consequently our bodies—respond to the moving images as they constantly shift in time, place and point of view. We are drawn into an active, embodied relationship with the virtual space on the screen as we continuously reorient ourselves, moving always forward in our desire to see the next image.⁶ Through this participation we create our own narrative, as noted by Eisenstein and later by Barthes.

The active-passive dialectic in film viewing raises the question of how vision and sound stimulate the other senses to give us a visceral or haptic experience of cinema. Deleuze speaks of perception as a “fusional world body of sensation” that cannot be confined to one sense or another; it is an experience that activates all the senses and is ultimately felt in the body.

Deleuze’s “becoming in sensation” operates simultaneously for both the fictional subject and for the viewer of the film. He writes that sensation:

has no sides at all, it is both [subject and object] indissolubly, it is ‘being-in-the-world’ as the phenomenologists say: at the same time I *become* in sensation and something *arrives* through sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And finally, it is the same body that gives and receives sensation, that is at the same time subject and object.”⁷

Thus we can feel horror, disgust, erotic thrills and other visceral emotions through images that we can only see and hear. But how is the phenomenological nature of perception affected when we see several images simultaneously? Does the split-screen format promote the dominance of vision over other senses? *The Tracey Fragments* offers rich ground for study of this question.

The film is based on Maureen Medved’s first-person novella about Tracey Berkowitz, “just a normal girl, 15, who hates herself.” The book grew out of a series of monologues which Medved performed on stage; she later wrote the screenplay and the graphic novel that was published when the film was released. (Director Bruce McDonald joked that the graphic novel was made for potential producers because it was easier to read than a script.)⁸



The Tracey Fragments: Tracey watches and is watched in the social arena of the high school hallway

Like most adaptations, the film is more linear than its source material but just barely, translating the fractured subjectivity of Medved's writing into its multi-screen mosaic. Her confessional, delusional, hysterical, ironic, unbearably vulnerable monologue inspired Ellen Page's voice-over for the film, which keeps us trapped inside Tracey's agonized perspective. The visual collage of the graphic novel reflects the simultaneous portrayal of past, present, future, and fantasy in the film.

This begs the question of how we perceive simultaneous images in a time-based medium. Do we consciously seek to interpret each changing pattern of shots? Do we focus on the dominant frame at any given moment? Or do we let the images carry us into a heightened state of anxiety that mirrors the mind of our protagonist? In a CBC interview McDonald said:

This wasn't just split screen to convey information and content. We wanted to use it more emotionally, like an echo, or like embroidery... We thought, the more we can experience the world the way little Tracey Berkowitz does, the closer we'll feel to her romantic notions, her tendency to exaggerate. We want to feel her crisis."⁹

This film transcends the usual definitions of form and content; its fragmentary structure is not just a stylistic embellishment but integral to our understanding of the story. It's difficult to refer to the linear narrative of the film because we are sometimes watching several time frames simultaneously. Yet it does have

a plot which gradually becomes clear. The 'present' seems to be the recurring scene of Tracey riding in circles on a city bus, wearing only a shower curtain, telling her story in fits and starts. What is revealed in her halting and contradictory narrative is the crisis that led her to this point—an abusive, claustrophobic home life; rejection at school; unrequited passion for a dangerous boy, culminating in a brutal sex scene in his car in the woods; and the disappearance of her little brother. Now on the bus she searches for him desperately, though, as we soon realize, she already knows what has become of him.

In the two university classes where I've shown *The Tracey Fragments*, most students wrote that after an initial period of confusion they allowed the film to carry them, maintaining one track of their minds for cognitive reconstruction just as we do with mysteries, thrillers and action films. McDonald heightens the trauma of certain moments by multiplying them with repetition or different angles, as when Tracey's mother hysterically slops food onto her plate over and over, or when her classmate trips her again and again in the high school corridor.

Linda Hutcheon notes that cinematic language has become increasingly eloquent in depicting character subjectivity; the *mise en scène* is determined by expressive and narrative design rather than naturalism. Cinema has developed techniques widely understood and accepted by the audience for representing the fictional character's interior world. Flashbacks, dream/fantasy sequences, point of view cinematography, and expressionistic sound design have enabled filmmakers, particularly in the age of CGI, to create a cinematic universe which uses



The Tracey Fragments: Ellen Page and Slim Twig aka Max Turnbull (Billy Zero)

the photographic image as a plastic device rather than a realistic rendering. This simulates a sense of living inside a character's head with a temporal-spatial fluidity that replicates the mind's ability to shift from the present to past and future, or to imaginary and even hallucinogenic states.¹⁰ Filmmakers are able to develop new visual analogues as audiences adapt increasingly to non-realist techniques. It is also possible in cinema to challenge the character's psychological integrity—to portray a consciousness fractured from emotional stress or mental illness, or even to question the unity of the narrative universe.

The Tracey Fragments goes much further than first-person voice-over and point-of-view camerawork to create a semblance of subjectivity. At some points the subject seems to disintegrate in the gap between contradictory images, or the disconnection between what she is telling us and what we are seeing. It is her voice that holds the fragments together, exposing the disjunctions in her behaviour and thoughts—a mirror of the contradictions in consciousness that all of us experience, and

arguably a more authentic portrayal of subjectivity than an integrated and consistent archetype.

A scene in a donut shop expresses the simultaneous 'inner' and 'outer' worlds in Tracey's imagination. Believing she has seen her little brother from the bus window, she jumps off and runs into the shop to look for him. She is overwhelmed not only by her own mission but by the alienating, fluorescent atmosphere of the shop, its toxic donuts, and a glimpse of someone else's nightmare—another young woman whose boyfriend is trying to talk her into entertaining his friend. In response to Tracey's stare, he snarls at her to fuck off and she races out again. Here, caught up in Tracey's frantic search for her brother, we are pulled into an oddly embodied/disembodied consciousness, distracted by minutiae because reality is so unbearable. A close-up of a pan of donuts reminds us that in the midst of her desperate grief, she might be hungry. As the pimp's aggression triggers Tracey's memory of her assault in the high school corridor, McDonald takes us there in flashback

as abruptly as Tracey's mind takes her in memory.

The split screen embodies Eisenstein's concept of spatial montage in the phenomenology of "being in the world," as Deleuze describes it. Our complete immersion in Tracey's subjective world from many angles at once builds more 'perception memory' than a single-screen version could. Lev Manovich characterizes split-screen spatial montage as a phenomenon which generates the accumulation of memories through the accumulation of images; as he says, "Nothing is forgotten, nothing is erased."¹¹ As the film progresses, so does the cumulative effect of Tracey's crises. Neither she nor the audience can escape the burden of what we have seen. Thus the ending of the film, which could be interpreted as a hopeful resolve to face the future, is negated by the weight of her (and our) accumulated memories.

In its best moments *The Tracey Fragments* represents Deleuze's 'becoming-in-sensation' simultaneously for both its fictional central character and for the viewer of the film. Watching the film, it seems that this fragmentary depiction of Tracey is a truer and more reliable portrayal of an unformed, un-mediated subjectivity than a more seamless presentation of character in a conventional narrative drama.

The Tracey Fragments does have one truly interactive component: McDonald posted some of the uncut footage on the film's website and invited fans to edit their own scenes, and some of these are included on the DVD. But this is an add-on, not part of the basic experience of the film, which remains deeply immersive for many viewers.

The Forking Path: *Late Fragment*

Some new media theorists have argued that narrative and interactivity can be compatible if the technical and cognitive interface for the viewer is kept extremely simple.¹² That seems to be the strategy followed by the makers of *Late Fragment* (Daryl Cloran, Anita Doron, Mateo Guez, 2007). The film was originally conceived as a lab project; it was only after its successful screening at the Toronto Film Festival that the producers decided to release it as a commercial DVD. It consists of three subplots based on three characters—Kevin, Theo and Faye—who come together in a 'restorative justice' therapy session which serves as home base for the interactive structure. Kevin is a night watchman who is harassed by his supervisor; Theo is a male stripper whose early abuser comes back into his life; Fay is a loving wife whose husband is molesting their teenaged daughter. Each of the three protagonists is either the victim or the perpetrator of a crime; who is which is not clear until the end.

At first *Late Fragment* seems like an ordinary feature film, until we enter the first group session and encounter a hot spot that shifts the action into a holding pattern, nudging the viewer to switch channels by clicking a mouse or remote. Each character's story is told in flashback; within each flashback are more hot spots which enable us to shift onto a different path.

In a Vancouver workshop, producer Ana Serrano recounted the development process. The original intent in the five-year process of making the film was to combine a drama, a documentary and a comedy, but this proved unworkable.¹³ A new creative team came up with the idea of using a restorative justice group meeting as a 'spinal node' which would keep the audience grounded as they navigated the three unrelated stories, and put the characters into a relationship.¹⁴ (Tracey's bus ride serves a similar purpose, anchoring her subjective flashback in the present tense). The primary concern was to keep

the viewer emotionally engaged and not disoriented.

The total filmed material of *Late Fragment* is 168 minutes, about twice as much as a viewer would see with minimal interaction. It is structured in an "M" form whereby viewers can click back and forth between two scenes, which Serrano described as 'reality' vs. imagination or memory. This gives us two time frames running simultaneously, though the difference between them is not immediately apparent since both appear as flashbacks that include all the characters in all the stories. The screenplay for Faye's story, for instance, designates scenes as 'present' (her lonely life at home and time spent at the prison waiting to see her daughter India); 'imagined present' (tender love scenes with her husband Marty or intimate moments with India); 'past' (unhappy family episodes, including some from India's point of view with Faye not present); or 're-imagined past' (similar scenes reframed as romantic fantasies).¹⁵ When watching these scenes combined with similar motifs in the other two stories, it is often unclear whether we are seeing past or present, fantasy or realism.

The designers added 'rabbit holes' which connect the three stories visually through such motifs as popping pills; the rabbit holes jump through the chapters and move the viewer more quickly through the stories. "Easter eggs" are bonus materials with extra characters meant to enrich the film's schematic plot. For example, a fourth man in the therapy group is not connected to any of the three main plots, but does have a moment of emotional connection with Faye which may trigger her recovery.

It is a truism among game designers that 90% of users will venture a bit out of the linear comfort zone but essentially be satisfied with the recognition that such play is possible; only 10% will fully explore the possibilities.¹⁶ Thus most viewers of *Late Fragment* will be driven, at least on first viewing, to progress through the story and resolve the plot as in a classical mystery. However, the film does not facilitate choices based on dramatic tension. As viewers we decide when to switch channels, but our control is limited. We are impelled to click when we encounter a repeating loop of close-ups oscillating between two or more characters in the therapy session. When we do click on a particular face, the ensuing scenes do not necessarily focus on that particular character. In fact it's difficult even to choose a character, because the delay in reaction to the click often results in shifting to another character. In any case, after clicking the plot continues to cut back and forth among the stories of the three protagonists. We cannot choose which direction the story will take and can only follow a specific character's story by returning to the menu each time we hit a fork in the path. Neither does clicking immediately reveal more about a character's background or the related crime. We remain in a state of instability between watching passively or choosing to break up the continuity without knowing where we will go.

The filmmakers have built in false clues that can mislead viewers who miss the clarifying scenes, prolonging the mystery sometimes past the end. Each character's journey has a resolution, but these will not necessarily be seen on first viewing. Thus there are rewards for multiple viewings or multiple interactions in a single view, but a version that doesn't include these final scenes seems incomplete.

In contrast to *The Tracey Fragments*, *Late Fragment's* surplus of images does not increase our empathy with the characters. Its high-key lighting, minimalist sound design and limited musical score seem intended to keep us at a distance. This is established in the first scene, with the drawn-out daylight shooting

of a sleeping man accompanied by ironic, distancing music; as the victim dies in agony we have time to study the quality and quantity of blood pouring from his mouth. Most of the film's erotic scenes are portrayed with clinical detachment, always underlined with the nagging question: "Should I click now? Click now? Click now?"

Majid Bagheri observes that *Late Fragment* has a high degree of authorial control—and thus a low degree of participant control. Its interactivity is exploratory rather than deterministic; the viewer has no influence over the outcome.¹⁷ As the producers describe it, watching *Late Fragment* is "not unlike channel surfing...except...that each channel presents different scenes from the same film."¹⁸ Except for the loops in the restorative justice scenes, if the viewer does not click the movie follows a default path.

Late Fragment's interface is transparent and interaction is simple, presumably to give more weight to the narrative arc. In Bagheri's view, its interactive component is insignificant, with little incentive to click because there is little sense of agency.¹⁹ Yet knowing there are hidden choices to be made, the viewer remains in a state of instability as to whether to watch passively or act.

Immersion and Interactivity

Based on anecdotal reports, *Late Fragment* seems for most participants to be a less engaging experience than *The Tracey Fragments* for three primary reasons. First, the split focus required of the viewer in interacting with the narrative disturbs empathy and dramatic tension. Second, what seems like agency does not really pay off—clicking leads to change without genuine control. Third, the conflict between narrative and database requires a simplification of narrative elements to keep from giving away the plot too soon or confusing the audience with details without context. Thus the characters and their tragic stories are reduced to stereotypes; dialogue is perfunctory; supporting characters are instrumental. Because the order of events for any particular viewing is somewhat unpredictable, the designers have salted the story with 'filler' scenes of characters brooding, cutting themselves, spying on family members, etc. to build suspense and portray their inner conflicts. However, the more one interacts with the film, the more these shots repeat. A moody close-up that increased dramatic tension on first or second viewing eventually leads to disengagement.

Many of the scenes of sex and violence feel strategic, if not gratuitous. Because the three characters are passive participants in the therapy session, their lack of relationship with one another adds to the sense of artifice. If the 'resolution' scenes for all three are not included in a screening, we are left in empathic limbo as their misery simply ends. In contrast, *The Tracey Fragments* is open-ended but wrenching, as Tracey marches into a blizzard insisting that she will survive. Some viewers interpret this as further delusion that will lead to her death; others believe that she has found a way to go on. Either way, we are emotionally involved.

It can be argued that character identification is not required for narrative, and certainly that the "willing suspension of disbelief" is not required for a meaningful aesthetic experience with a film. Yet *Late Fragment* seems to want to play by these rules, with its hyper-dramatic stories of murder and betrayal. Reading the screenplay for Faye's story is more engaging than actually 'playing' the film.

The boundaries of cinematic narrative continue to be chal-

lenged by more recent projects. Continuing on the path of viewer choice is the Dawid Marcinkowski's *Suffurosa* (2011, www.suffurosa.com/), currently making the festival circuit as a 40-minute live show, which combines video, animation, and text in the familiar framework of the detective story. It is described as a "'choose your own adventure' neo-noir with three alternate endings."²⁰ On the other hand, filmmakers are courting immersion in a new way with projects extended through live simulation. Lance Weiler's *Pandemic* was launched at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival as a 'transmedia storytelling experience (which) unites film, mobile and online technologies, props, social gaming and data visualization, enabling audiences to step into the shoes of the pandemic protagonists' in a live simulation that took place around the festival site.²¹

It seems at this point that embodied interactivity is a more immersive virtual experience than pushing a button to choose which story to follow. For the most part, the most successful interactive films to date have been documentaries rather than dramas. As we see from comparing *The Tracey Fragments* to *Late Fragment*, it's not a surplus of information but a deficit of authorship that leaves us wanting and wondering if interactive narrative will ever be successful. Perhaps it will if we can find an embodied form of immersion—if rather than pushing a button, we can engage with the film through all of our senses as we do in a spellbinding movie that makes us laugh, cringe, cry and sigh. But that's another story.

Notes

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- 16 O'Flynn, Siobhan, "A Whirlwind Tour: Updating the Digital Landscape for Content Producers," *What's Going On Salon*, Simon Fraser University, 20 Nov. 2010
- 17 Majid's notes: 25: "Embedded structure"—limited narrative choices in content-based texts. Emergent structures result in unexpected content (i.e. video games). "Any sense of play is reduced to acquiescence (Zimmerman)"
- 18 *Late Fragment* website <http://latefragment.com> (Retrieved March 16, 2011).
- 19 Bagheri, 74
- 20 2011 Vancouver International Film Festival catalogue p. 23.
- 21 *Pandemic* website: <http://lanceweiler.com/2011/01/pandemic-1-0/>

Engendering Genre

by ROBERT JAMES CARDULLO

What creates a new genre, particularly in so relatively young an artistic form as film? The same thing that creates a new genre in other art forms—a combination of social perception and aesthetic revision, or social change and aesthetic impulse—with the exception that film, in Robert Warshow's words, is a more "immediate experience" than the other art forms.

This means that it reacts to and reflects social currents faster than, say, the novel (whose rise in the eighteenth century is attributable to the rise of the middle class and with it a larger reading public). The drama can be just as fast in this sense as the cinema, both being "group" art forms that depend on the physical co-mingling, or communion, of spectators, but it cannot command the huge audience, worldwide, which is drawn to film and feeds off it in a mutually dependent or sustaining relationship.

When you combine film's speedy reaction-time (let us call it) with the continuing evolution of its form and technique (given its comparatively recent birth date of 1895), and then add the growing number of young artists who are drawn to filmmaking because of the relative ease, these days, of entering the field (again, partly the result of technical developments that, outside places like Hollywood, make moviemaking cheaper and easier)—well, you have a potent mixture that at any

Marcell Nagy as György in Lajos Koltai's *Fateless*





time can combust into a new genre or subgenre. To go back to the 1930s, when of course Hollywood or the American film "industry" was still king, think only of what the invention of sound and the rise of organized crime gave to us: the gangster film. Further, consider what the invention of sound, the concomitant need to engage Broadway dramatists to write sparkling dialogue, and the increasing independence of women produced: the screwball comedy.

This leads me to a consideration of the first of four film genres-in-the-making: the Holocaust film, which by now may already be "made." But its making raises a by-now familiar question: should there be a continual flow of movies on this subject? Do we need continual reminders of what happened at the death camps, or have images of Nazi atrocities been sufficiently burned into our collective memory? In short, is a Holocaust genre necessary? I hasten to add here that I am not one of those who believe that the enormity of the Holocaust is above and beyond presentation in artistic form, except in the most indirect or metaphorical way. I have never believed this, and maintain that those who do wish simultaneously to apothecize the victimhood of the Jews and to deny the transformative powers of art. After all, if Christ's crucifixion can be depicted on film (in a veritable genre unto itself, as, most recently, *The Passion of the Christ* [2004] and *The Gospel of John* [2003] have shown us), so too can that of twentieth-century Jews. The ultimate question in art, of course, is not *what* you present but *how* you present it, not so much the message as the medium.

Some have chosen to treat the Holocaust in documentary-film form, such as Alain Resnais in *Night and Fog* (1955), out of the apparent belief that no one could quarrel with the unvarnished truth, however horrible it might be. But Claude Lanzmann implicitly quarrels with Resnais in *Shoah* (1985), his nine-and-one-half-hour documentary on the Nazi extermination of European Jewry, by not including any imagery of his picture's central subject. We see interviews with survivors, with "former" Nazis, with Holocaust historians; we see the sites of the concentration camps. We do not, however, watch footage of the Jewish ghettos, of the emaciated camp survivors, or of the piles of corpses, as we do in *Night and Fog* and numerous other films about the German atrocities. This is one way of saying that these atrocities are beyond representation, even in documentary form, and that to represent them is somehow to endorse them; that, before as well as after the Third Reich, such brutality on such a scale was and remains unimaginable, or, conversely, is conceivable only in the mortal imagination. (Indeed, Lanzmann himself has said that "fiction about the Holocaust is a transgression; I deeply believe that there are some things that cannot and should not be represented.")

Other directors have elected to treat the Holocaust in fictional form (if that is the appropriate term), going as far back as Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* (1948) and Aleksander Ford's *Border Street* (1949), continuing with Andrzej Munk's *The Passenger* (1963), and stretching into the present with Andrzej Wajda's *Korczak* (1990), Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa* (1991), Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* (1998), and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002). Each of these films, with the possible exception of the documentary-like *Last Stage*, is marred by broad or monochromatic characterizations and rhetorical gestures. All but one was shot in Poland, where today only a few thousand Jews are left out of the more than three million who lived there before Hitler's arrival in 1939. At least three make the fatal error

of turning the Holocaust into a morality play that diminishes the humanity of Holocaust victims either by depicting the genocide of the Jews solely from the point of view of the German perpetrators (*Schindler's List*); by sugarcoating the camps themselves in the process of reaffirming the humanity of concentration-camp victims, and thus diminishing the guilt of the war criminals; or by managing to commit both these sins with its portrait of a man whose Judaism is largely an accident of birth, whose Christian girlfriend is anything but a Polish anti-Semite or Nazi collaborator, and whose life is saved by a kindly German officer with a saving love for classical music (*The Pianist*).

Yet another Holocaust film came along five years into the twenty-first century—one that I hesitated to see—but, among its other virtues, *Fateless* (2005) is an assurance to those of us who fear that the Holocaust is congealing into just another movie genre. There are several reasons why. First, the screenplay is by Imre Kertész, not some film-world hand (as in the cases of the three Holocaust pictures prior to this one)—adapted by this Hungarian Nobel laureate from his novel of the same name. Furthermore, the book is based on his own experiences beginning in German-occupied Budapest. In 1944, when he was fourteen, Kertész, who is Jewish, was deported to Auschwitz and was subsequently moved from this death camp to various labor camps. He was liberated by the Americans in 1945 and insisted on returning to Budapest rather than be resettled in the United States. The outline of Kertész's own story is also an outline of the film; and, though *Fateless* contains little that will be new to any informed viewer, it fascinates for all of its 140 minutes, never lapsing into the pitfalls of this particular "genre": exploitation, facileness, sentimentality.

The second reason for the truthfulness (in every sense) of *Fateless*, related to the first, is that it depicts the genocide of the Jews from the point of view not of the perpetrators, but of the victims themselves. And the director, Lajos Koltai (here making his directing debut, but better known as a cinematographer on such pictures as *Mephisto* [1981] and *Colonel Redl* [1985]), is careful to remind us of his film's perspective aurally as well as visually. The boy who plays the fourteen-year-old character of György, for example, is given a good deal of voice-over narration as connective tissue. Perhaps more important, *Fateless* is marvelously concerned with faces—Jewish faces. Throughout the film, to be sure, long shots and panoramas, particularly of the prisoners *en masse*, recur as reminders of historical context; but principally Koltai wants his picture to have its being in the faces of the boy and all those he encounters, whom he *sees*. Every face thus becomes at least a minute—and in some ways imperishable—biography. Moreover, Koltai gives *Fateless* an overall lingering or album effect by closing nearly every scene with a quick fade instead of a sharp and relentless cut.

Inevitably enough, Koltai chose an excellent cinematographer, Gyula Pados, and together they have provided *Fateless* with a visual texture that is (appositely) in limbo. The palette is muted, so that the film seems, most of the time, to hover between color and black-and-white. Color in the concentration camp scenes would have been upsetting; colors in the beginning or end would have made *Fateless* a "movie," like *Schindler's List*. Throughout, the very palette of this picture—black-and-white, in color—thus conveys an aura of captivity, of a world imprisoned between the two worlds of past and future. (The acting of Marcell Nagy as György does something similar: he doesn't act for the camera so much as he moves through an



Marcos's family in Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven*

enclosing reality as if the camera weren't there, creating from within yet fixing himself without in a being, a total presence, that will last as long as film itself.) But captive to the budding Holocaust genre *Fateless* is not. Indeed, this film bursts through the bounds of genre to become itself, and itself alone. It does so not merely because of the talent of those (including the extensive, and flawless, cast) who are exploring this grave—one can almost say consecrated—subject, but because every moment in *Fateless* is treated as a unit of trust and even faith, in both senses of the word. Every moment, in other words, is a captive one.

The second of my four film genres-in-the-making is not so much the anti-narrative film as the feature film that bridges the gap between the non-narrative and the storied, the avant and the garde, the abstract or abstracted and the representational. There have been a number of such films over the last five years or so, from the United States as well as abroad: Gus Van Sant's *Last Days* (2005), Jun Ichikawa's *Tony Takitani* (2004), Kim Ki-duk's *3-Iron* (2004), Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), and Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005). We can add another one to this list: *Woman Is the Future of Man* (2005). Like *3-Iron*, Hong Sang-soo's film is from South Korea, and I propose now to treat it at length, as well as the new genre to which it is contributing.

In their own highly individual ways, each of the filmmakers cited above turns his or her attention away from plots, reducing their importance if not eliminating them altogether, and

rediscovers the essential elements of cinematic form: the painterly image, the musical gesture, the poetic presence. A recurrent motif in the history of purely avant-garde film itself is the very idea that the medium need not have become a narrative, representational one at all, but could instead have modeled itself on other art forms, especially painting and music. A history of avant-garde cinema could be constructed in just such terms, counterpoising the origins of orthodox or mainstream narrative cinema in literature and theater with the painterly, poetic, and musical origins of the first avant-garde experiments in film. So what Van Sant, Ichikawa, Kim, Gondry, July, and Hong are doing today amounts to a kind of aesthetic revisionism toward the displacement and deformation of linear narrative in favor of such techniques as visual collage, musical counterpoint, circus-like simultaneity, and poetic compression or distillation.

I would also venture, however, that this narrative reduction by contemporary filmmakers has as much to do with social perception as aesthetic revisionism. That is, these writer-directors are less interested in what their characters do next, and more concerned with the fact that,

in any deeply committed sense, their characters don't really know what to do next. And it is in an attempt to depict this widespread, contemporary malaise (related to the general decline of religious belief and the ongoing crisis of geopolitics) that an increasing number of film artists are contravening traditional cinematic structure, with its cause and effects, its clear linkages, its neat exposition and tidy closure. They certainly are not all good artists merely because of such contravention—but some of them are, and all of them are disquietingly significant in the face of what appears to be a nameless void. It used to be called the existential Absurd, but such a highfalutin term seems out of place in this era of diminished intellect. In the paradoxical age of global terrorism, the pax Americana, nuclear proliferation, renewed religious enmity between extremists of every stripe, and Communist holdout (did I miss anything?), let us simply call this current condition material oblivion or its equivalent, spiritual deprivation.

South Korea, of course, is south of one of the world's last, and most troublesome, Communist strongholds. And this is where Hong Sang-soo has been making films since 1996, after taking his undergraduate as well as graduate education in the United States. He has made nine pictures to date, the fifth of which is *Woman Is the Future of Man* (whose purposefully misleading title, incidentally, is lifted from a poem by the Communist-Surrealist French poet Louis Aragon). All of Hong's films overtly or indirectly subvert narrative expectations, in the first place through the elliptical editing of dual narratives by

placing them, or parts of them, one after the other, such that story A and story B play off each other enigmatically and even abstractly rather than in clearly defined contrasts or carefully arranged juxtapositions. Furthermore, in Hong's *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996) and *The Power of Kangwon Province* (1998), characters only mentioned in the first story emerge in the second, thereby evoking eerie connections between friends and strangers that culminate in both pictures in mysterious as well as cruel deaths.

All of Hong's movies additionally feature filmmakers or film actors among their characters, and there may be a connection between this and the fact that Hong is a financially unsuccessful art-house director in a country addicted to blockbusters (one form of material oblivion) of the American as well as the Korean kind, and therefore predisposed to "obsess" not only over his own fate but also over the relationship between film and reality. The issue of art-house versus commercial cinema even gets raised in Hong's *Rashomon*-like *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000), during an argument between filmmakers over a stolen camera. The tragedy in *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate* (2002) itself is set in motion when a movie actor begins to pursue a beautiful female fan. Similarly, in *A Tale of Cinema* (2006), which also includes a darkly funny film-within-a film, a failed director becomes dangerously obsessed with a rising star. And one of the main characters in *Woman Is the Future of Man* happens to be a man who went to America to study filmmaking (like Hong himself?)—in the process spurning the woman who loved him.

The two main characters in *Woman Is the Future of Man*, set in and around Seoul today, behave as if their lives have something other than material direction. Hunjoon, single, is the aspiring filmmaker who has just returned from the United States; Munho, married, is a university lecturer whose specialty is the history of Western art. Each young man, then, in his way, has career projects in mind that are designed to do more than merely make money, but Hong knows more about them than they know about themselves. These men's lives are actually emptier than they are willing to acknowledge—morally and spiritually as well as emotionally vacuous—and the shape and pace of Hong's film show it.

Consider, for example, the opening sequence of *Woman Is the Future of Man*. Hunjoon meets his old friend Munjo outside the latter's heavily mortgaged, gated, luxurious suburban home. Curiously, Munho never invites Hunjoon inside to meet the lady of the house; instead, he gives him a cursory tour of the grounds. And it is during this awkward moment of forced domestic exile, as it were, that Munho offers his recently repatriated college buddy a peculiar gift: an invitation to track



Marcos and Ana, after sex, in Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven*

through the season's first snowfall, which has accumulated on the front lawn. Accepting the offer, Hunjoon begins to walk exclusively in one direction before doubling back on his steps in order to leave only a single set of footprints in the snow. This seemingly incidental episode provides us with an introductory metaphor not only for the film's subject—the attempt to retrace or relive the past—but also for one of its themes, which is that we cannot recover or re-create the past, we can only repeat it (and its mistakes) in the present.

The very next scene then underlines and augments this theme. Munho and Hunjoon go to a restaurant where they sit at a table, eat raw squid, drink rice wine, and talk for five or six minutes—in one wide shot, unedited and unvaried. What the two men reveal about their pasts, especially in regard to the same young woman, connects with their (sometimes strained) relationship and plans in the present; but it is the very persistence of the shot itself, the long take, that is Hong's overriding comment. For he is telling us, visually, that the two friends are static—not necessarily in their visible careers (though academic tenure, a kind of stasis, is Munho's only goal, and Hunjoon himself is ready to teach to pay his bills, since his film career is going nowhere—he hasn't even written his first screenplay yet) but in their most private beings.

Hong uses this device of the held shot, filmed at an equivocal distance, again—with these two and with other characters—for it is his means of depicting personal stagnation. Indeed, everything personal that occurs in *Woman Is the Future*

of *Man*, in talk as well as external action, seems haphazard or desultory and therefore directionless, a mimesis of inner beings, of inner voids, that are covered over with a patina of purpose. This is true in the film even of the sex, that most personal of acts, which happens here several times in several ways with the woman mentioned in the previous paragraph, but which seems only the fulfillment of social routine by the participants rather than the expression of lustful heat, let alone romantic desire. Over the restaurant table, in fact, Munho reinforces this idea by declaring, "Koreans are too fond of sex. They have nothing better to do. There's no real culture." (And one of the saddest indictments of another culture you will ever hear is this query by the woman—I have deliberately neglected to give her name, Sunhwa, because names connote identities, and, even more so than her two former boyfriends, she doesn't have one—in mid-intercourse to Munho: "Can I moan?")

Let me continue by detailing what else of a personal nature is revealed in the restaurant conversation, as well as in what passes for a plot in so meandering (though, at eighty-eight minutes, relatively short) a film as *Woman Is the Future of Man*. Like overgrown college boys, both Munho and Hunjoon each attempt, separately, to seduce an attractive young waitress at the restaurant under the pretense of being inspired to capture her beauty through their respective arts. Rebuffed, the two men quietly feign indifference by awkwardly looking off into the street and abstractedly focusing their attention on another woman, who is wearing a purple scarf. Bearing a passing

resemblance to Sunhwa, the female figure from Munho and Hunjoon's past, the scarved young lady briefly makes eye contact with each man before turning away. This repeated incident of rejection involving an anonymous woman then gets the male friends to talking about their mutual conquest of Sunhwa, in an attempt to assuage their bruised egos.

Neither man has seen Sunhwa for years, but Munho knows that she settled down in a nearby town and works in the local hotel's bar as a cocktail waitress. We soon learn, in the film's first flashback, that Hunjoon dated her first; that, while dating Hunjoon, Sunhwa was kidnapped and raped by a boy she knew from high school who had just been discharged from the military; and that Hunjoon's self-gratifying idea of "cleansing" Sunhwa of this violation was to have sex with her himself after duly washing her nether regions. Still in flashback, he promises to keep in touch once he goes to study in the States, but Hunjoon does nothing of the kind, and the heartbroken, abandoned Sunhwa falls for Munho (in a second flashback) at a time when she is feeling most vulnerable.

Hong shuffles his time scheme when he starts using these flashbacks, leaping backward, then forward, and then back again—sometimes making us, and perhaps the characters too, wonder where we are. As when the film cuts from one moment in the past during which Munho and Sunhwa have a happy, flirty encounter, to a follow-up sex scene (after a few weeks or a few months? after several years?) in which, sex or no sex, they can barely tolerate each other's presence. Some scenes even

The threat of violence looms over Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven*



appear to run, not in sequence like these two, but in parallel as it were. We observe Munho alone, for example, seated at the side of an outdoor sports arena, wrapped in a scarf; then we see him, bare-necked, approach a group of his students—at the same time, in the same place, with the same dazzling sun and glistening snow—and accept a scarf from them. How can both scenes be true or possible, except in reverse or in reverie—or in a movie like *Woman Is the Future of Man*, where what happens next matters less than what is transpiring in a kind of static, eternal, multidimensional present, or where what happens next is less important than what doesn't?

Back in the present, feeling his rice wine, Munho can't resist joining Hunjoon in the latter's quest to see Sunhwa. All three meet after she finishes her night shift at the hotel bar, as the men wait in a nearby restaurant, where they continue to drink—this time beer. The tensions between Munho and Hunjoon have increased, moreover, not only because of increased alcohol-intake, but also because of their divergent (yet equally erroneous or extreme), rivalrous views of Sunhwa: Hunjoon the errant romantic puts her on a pedestal, whereas Munho the serial adulterer sees her as an easy lay (like some of the female students of his whom he has seduced). Sunhwa nonetheless takes her pair of former lovers back to her apartment, where the love triangle repeats itself in a drunken ritual of stumbling dance, stale sex, primal betrayal, and painful humiliation.

If excessive drinking is the catalyst for deadlock and degradation in *Woman Is the Future of Man* (as in Hong's other films), however, it's in the lingering hangover that follows where the characters dwell—especially the two men. After Munho and Hunjoon both sleep at Sunhwa's apartment, they awake purporting to remember very little and then disperse to wander the city of Seoul: literally to wander, not to "find themselves" or get their bearings, as they try to "walk off" the blistering headaches that otherwise paralyze them. It is Munho in particular, looking for love in all the wrong places, whom we follow deeper and deeper into a perpetual night of soulless discontent, and whom we leave as, at one point, he simply stands there in the snow, idling.

As one can deduce from my description of this film, there is great danger in Hong's procedure. Dramatists learned long ago that it is risky to include just one static character in a play, because he or she may so easily bore the audience. In the cinema, Antonioni took such a risk, but to see how he used a static character dramatically, have a look at Giulia in the 1959 film *L'avventura* (to take just one example from his *oeuvre*). Hong may not use his static characters dramatically, but he does vary his picture's emotional tone if not its visual style to keep us guessing—and interested—for all of eighty-eight minutes. Even within one scene, the tone of *Woman Is the Future of Man* can shift from light satirical comedy (hinted at by Yong-jin Jeong's jaunty, light-hearted musical score) to grim realistic drama (expressed not only by the cinematographer Hyeon-gu Kim's clinical, blue-dominated palette, but also by an icily observational camera-mode that does not allow for a single close-up, even—or especially—during sex scenes). This strategy works because, though from time to time we wait a bit impatiently for the next cigarette or the next disconnected chat with a woman, most of the time we are held by a conviction that Hong not only knows what he is risking, he is doing it for a grave contemporary purpose.

That said, Hong insists on a frustratingly amoral stance in the

face of his characters' actions and motivations, pitching them into one gray area after another (and some not-so-gray areas as well) yet abjuring every opportunity to comment on their response, or lack of response, to the tawdry situations in which they find themselves. This makes *Woman Is the Future of Man* a provocative and even disturbing experience, for nevertheless it demands from its viewers a response—without the reassurance of much guidance on Hong's part. Moreover, the flat placidity of the performances (Yoo Jitae as Munho, Kim Toewoo as Hunjoon, and former Miss Korea Sung Hyunan as Sunhwa)—particularly of Sunhwa, who is a disconcerting blend of the pliable and the numb—doesn't give much away.

Nor does Hong's own "static" analysis of his film's title: "As the future is yet to come, it means nothing, and if the future is multiplied by man, the result is still zero." (Aragon's own title and poem, by contrast, were designed to express his passion for women and his vision for a society that would permit women to be more in charge of their own destiny.) So we are left with a negative and maybe nihilistic film that risks aesthetic tedium in the process of analyzing socio-cultural tedium. For me *Woman Is the Future of Man* succeeds as a poetic evocation not just of Korea's fractured soul, but of present-day anomie in general. Still, I can understand the argument that if Hong's cinema is the future of man, or the harbinger of film art, we should all drink to diminished expectations—women included.

The third of my four genres-in-the-making is the film with unsimulated sex acts (as opposed to the simulated kind to be found in *Woman Is the Future of Man*)—not pornography, of course, which consists of explicit sexual acts that are gratuitous, or designed merely for viewer-titillation. The unsimulated sexual activity I'm talking about is part of, or related to, a picture's (serious) theme, which may or may not be concerned with sexuality itself. So perhaps it's better to call the "film with unsimulated sexual activity" a subgenre, since sex itself—the sheer physical act of sex—need not be its focus. Sometimes it is the focus, as in the cases of Nagisa Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999), and Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs* (2004). But sometimes the sex is graphic at the same time that it's not the focus, or the sole one, as in Marco Bellocchio's *Devil in the Flesh* (1986), Vincent Gallo's *The Brown Bunny* (2003), and Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (2005).

Now sex is hardly novel in films these days, and it hasn't been since the 1960s, when mainstream cinema began pushing the boundaries as to what would be permitted on screen. (The depiction of sexuality in mainstream cinema was at one time restricted by federal law in the United States, as well as by self-imposed industry standards in Hollywood.) But most of the time, in the past as in the present, the on-screen sex is simulated. Increasingly, however, sex in otherwise non-pornographic movies is becoming explicit, as shown by this supplementary list of fiction features from the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, all of them featuring either fellatio, intercourse, or both: *The Idiots* (1998), *I Stand Alone* (1998), *La donna lupo* (1999), *Guardami* (1999), *Polax* (1999), *Giulia* (1999), *Baise-moi* (2000), *Intimacy* (2001), *Dog Days* (2001), *In the Cut* (2003), *Anatomy of Hell* (2004), *Antares* (2004), and *All About Anna* (2005).

We shouldn't be surprised by this development, since sex, even in seriously intended films (which still have to make money), sells, and since the cinema, like any other art form but especially a popular one, abhors a vacuum: what hasn't been

done, will be done. Moreover, the cinema is the most “immediate” of aesthetic experiences in that, to a greater degree than the other arts (including theater), it reflects contemporary currents—social, political psychological, sexual—the fastest. And what could be more contemporary than the amoral or non-judgmental stance of many Westerners (and, increasingly, of people from other parts of the world) toward fornication, promiscuity, and adultery—in some cases even sadomasochism and pedophilia? So if anything goes off-screen, why shouldn’t anything go on-screen? (Do I need to add here that the overwhelming majority of cinematic sex scenes, unsimulated or not, take place between unmarried couples?) Indeed, why shouldn’t it be the cinema’s duty, as the most graphically representational of art forms, to reflect the new permissiveness and to reflect it as realistically as possible? Art may not be life, but when it’s as lifelike as film, the temptation is to stop imitating reality and to start creating it.

The latest example of a film that creates its own sexual reality is *Battle in Heaven*, and I’d like to treat it here not only for its sexual candor but also for its narrative discursiveness. In a sense, this Mexican film combines both the second and the third of my genres-in-the-making. Indeed, Reygadas, whose second picture this is after *Japón* (2002), is said to have remarked that narrative is merely a marketing necessity for a movie and not integral to its making. This view, curiously like that of some nineteenth-century opera composers who merely wanted plot armatures on which to hang their arias, could not be more clearly expressed than in *Battle in Heaven*. Many of the things we see are more affecting—or disaffecting—than the almost haphazard story that connects them. Events here are simply chronicled, slowly, and often with atmospheric excursions.

For instance, during one scene of intercourse, the camera goes out the window and pans around 360 degrees to take in the whole of the empty courtyard of the apartment house in which the sex is happening, and only then returns to the couple, lying side by side yet silently objectified and removed from each other. This movement itself is an echo of the camera circling around the same couple, as she performs fellatio on him, from the start of *Battle in Heaven*—before the start, during the pre-credit sequence. The fact that an explicit act of fellatio begins this picture tells us, in fact, that the picture most likely will not be pornography. A porn director would tease a while and not put the act right at the beginning. If actual sex occurs at the start, the film is probably a serious work—promptly signaling to us that it will scorn convention. And a serious (if sometimes heavy-handed) work *Battle in Heaven* is, on the subjects of social class, religion, nationhood, and sexuality as they intersect with the kind of moral inertia familiar to us from Hong Sang-soo’s film: a moral inertia that, in this instance, is symbolized by the encircling, entrapping movement of the camera.

A straightforward description of the plot of *Battle in Heaven* would make it sound like a *noir* crime thriller or even a tempestuous *verismo* opera, but here goes. Marcos, married, middle-aged, blank-faced, and potbellied, has been engaged as a chauffeur for the past fifteen years for an important Mexican general, work that includes driving his daughter, Ana, around Mexico City (and has done since she was a child). Now nineteen, lovely, sylphlike, Ana works part-time in a seedy bordello—not for the money, clearly, but as an act of rebellion, debasement, and masochism. (This last touch may suggest *Belle de Jour* [1967] to some viewers, but *Battle in Heaven* has none of the progressive, role-playing tension of Buñuel’s film.)

Marcos is the only member of Ana’s household or her immediate circle who knows that she is leading a double life; and, because he knows her secret, he gets a little action of his own on the side, unbeknownst either to Marcos’s wife or Ana’s boyfriend. (Marcos and Ana are the couple in the sex acts described in the previous paragraph; their opening scene of fellatio, moreover, is reprised at the very end of *Battle in Heaven*.)

Marcos has sex with his wife as well in this film, but it’s not pretty, even if Jesus himself watches from a painting on the wall: she weighs about 300 pounds, and, as he takes her from behind, we see their rolls of fat jiggling up and down. Reygadas is interested, however, more in what happens on the inside during sex than in what happens on the outside. Movies that concentrate on the outside in order to arouse us are pornographic, of course, and *Battle in Heaven* is not pornography. If Marcos and his wife are making love, the point is not to establish the fact that they are making love. What matters is what you can learn about their relationship from the way they make love. And, to that end, it’s no accident that Marcos and his wife’s scene ends with a loving hug, whereas Marcos and Ana’s mechanical copulation ends with an extreme close-up of his uncircumcised penis losing its erection.

Such explicitness is part of *Battle in Heaven*’s meaning, for Reygadas is less concerned with bodies in the erotic sense than in the way that they, and their positioning, can be indicators of class. To wit: body shapes are influenced by economics, such that the folks without the money to dine well end up feasting on junk food instead, which sticks to their figures. Furthermore, Marcos lies passive beneath the controlling Ana during his sex with her, or the princess is on top and the peasant is on the bottom; whereas Marcos takes the dominant position during intercourse with his woman, or the chauffeur drives it home.

Chauffeur for a general or not, Marcos and his wife—who sells clocks and cakes from a blanket spread on the floor of a subway station—are desperate for money. And to get some, they have kidnapped a baby for ransom; but the infant has been accidentally killed in their custody, before its mother (an acquaintance no less) was able to raise the cash. The megapolis of Mexico City, a polluted and corrupt city with a population of over twenty million, suffers thousands of such kidnappings-for-profit each year, and these abductions are committed against the poor—as in this case—as well as the rich, with ransom demands as low as \$1500. The couple regards the kidnapped baby’s death as regrettable—not least because of the lost ransom money—but not catastrophic, one more grim fact in a life of grim facticity. In other words, they feel no pressing guilt despite the fact that they are members of the most guilt-laden religion in the world, Catholicism—that’s the level to which moral standards have sunk in Mexico City. (The title, by the way, is an ironic allusion to the epochal battle between the rebel archangel Lucifer and God for control of heaven, in which Lucifer was banished for eternity to the flaming bowels of hell.)

But something begins to happen to Marcos after he confesses his crime to Ana, in the comfort of whose body he has tried to hide. That is, he starts suffering, not from Catholic guilt, but from a natural revolt once his new physical or “natural” partner learns his secret; and his inner, secret being revolts against his outer, openly material one. Ana urges Marcos to turn himself in to the police, but he puts off doing so until he explodes—and stabs her to death. He is not pleased, you see, with what she has been doing with her life, sinning against herself as much as the Church through her acts of prostitution. Marcos’s wife is not



The female suicide-bomber awaits her fate in Julia Loktev's *Day Night Day Night*.



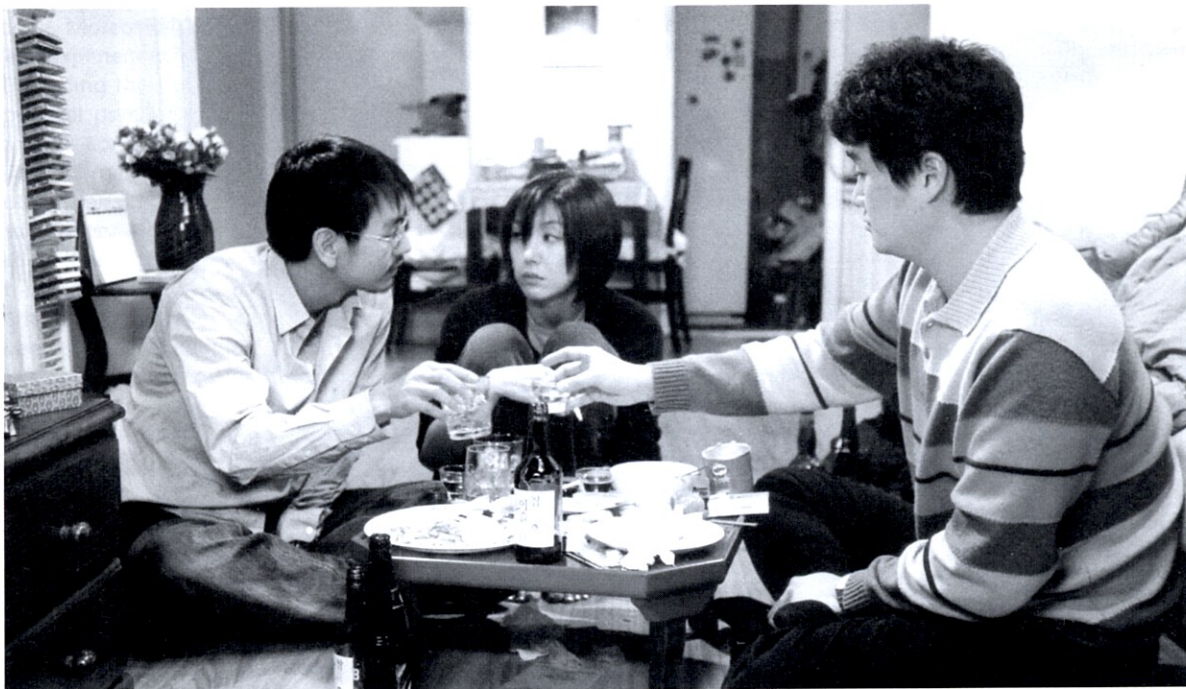
Final preparations for Luisa Williams, as the suicide-bomber, in Julia Loktev's *Day Night Day Night*.

pleased that—as her husband reveals to her—he admitted their crime to Ana. And Marcos himself is not pleased with his own doings as a kidnapper who is also guilty of involuntary infanticide. He's not happy, either, with the hard fact that, sex though they may have, he and Ana are from completely different worlds and can never be together on an internal, intimate level—except in another dimension, which can only be achieved through death.

The latter portion of *Battle in Heaven* deals with Marcos's deteriorating mental state combined with his wish to die, the way in which he looks for death, and the manner in which he's granted his wish. (A death-wish links *Battle in Heaven* with Reygadas's *Japón*, except that in the earlier film, which shows the influence of Abbas Kiarostami and Theo Angelopoulos, it is thwarted. In this work, a middle-aged painter from Mexico City who travels to a remote mountain village to commit suicide is mysteriously re-invigorated by the forces of the natural world

that surrounds him.) The climactic set piece is shot amid an annual, and actual, pilgrimage of thousands to the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe (a dark-skinned incarnation of the Virgin Mary, and the patron saint of Mexico), where chanting priests lead a hooded Marcos, moving along on bloodied knees and in urine-soaked pants, on a *via crucis* to beg forgiveness—and to engender his brutal self-punishment.

For the Virgin's forgiveness is not enough for Marcos, as it is for his wife. He cannot absolve his crimes by turning himself in to the authorities or by going on a religious pilgrimage—alternatives that at first seem separate but cannot be separated in a country like Mexico, where the Church is sponsored by the state. A mysteriously willed death—not one at the hands of the police—is Marcos's only solution, where he can be reunited with Ana in heaven (or is it hell?) as she goes down on him in the reprised fellatio scene, with the difference that now no tears fall from Ana's eyes, Marcos is not wearing a condom, and he



Hunjoon and Munjo share a drink with Sunhwa in Hong Sang-soo's *Woman Is the Future of Man*

and Ana both declare their love for one another. (At the start as well as the finish, this scene is dissimilar in tone and visual design from the rest of the picture, being almost abstract in conception—with no set dressing and a blank, vaguely luminous background.)

Battle in Heaven is book-ended, moreover, not only by this ritualistic spectacle of oral sex, but also by images of the raising and lowering, the unfurling and collapse, of a gigantic Mexican flag. (It is Ana's father, the general, who supervises the daily flag ceremonies; and it is Marcos who ambles along after a parade of snappy Mexican soldiers at the morning ceremony, and who in his ambling makes his own kind of comment on the soldiers', and the general's, snappiness.) In between, we get an equally startling juxtaposition of the sexual and the political as a dramatic soccer match, charged with nationalist hyperbole, is revealed not only to be televised, but also to be the object of Marcos's viewing pleasure as he masturbates. The very last shot, of church bells—whose piercing ringing itself has been juxtaposed against, or drowned out by, the sound of a raging waterfall during *Battle in Heaven*—adds the final ingredient to the film's potent thematic mix.

If the above summary of *Battle in Heaven's* action sounds plot-driven—contrary to what I've said—it isn't so much as it is mood-driven. And the mood is Marcos's. What is special about Reygadas's film is the way in which it articulates the rupture in reality that Marcos has experienced as a result of his crimes, with the plot details serving as coordinates in the mapping of a very particular existential terrain (an inner being in revolt, as I described earlier). It is in giving the audience direct perceptual access to Marcos's confused and vulnerable sense of the world, through subjective shots but also through objective ones that nonetheless convey his state of mind (such as a preternaturally silent shot in the mountains during which, surrounded by mist, Marcos appears—depending on the viewer's perspective—either to ascend into heaven or to be swallowed up by the clouds), that *Battle in Heaven* excels. The drama of the picture

is not, at least up until the closing scenes, what the world will do to Marcos so much as how he will perceive that world through his ruptured consciousness.

It is significant, for example, that the audience sees nothing of the infant's kidnapping and subsequent death; instead, from the outset we are plunged into the world as Marcos experiences it in the aftermath of these two eruptions. The shambling, fat-tish, unprepossessing, relatively inarticulate yet strangely moving protagonist is thus put in the position of having to renegotiate his relationship to the world, of having to process feelings that refuse to clarify themselves and which he proves himself ill-equipped to handle. Rather than giving us a Hitchcockian configuration of paranoid reciprocation between the main character and his environment, however, Reygadas presents us with a space that appears relentlessly objective and detached even when it is imbued with the protagonist's subjectivity. And it is Marcos's inability to reconcile the tumultuousness of his inner conflict with the indifference of reality that *Battle in Heaven's* cinematic style is meant to reflect.

This dislocation or disconnection is graphed through a series of impeccably conceived and sometimes extreme behaviors or gestures rather than through dialogue. As when, after his wife informs him by cell phone of the baby's death, Marcos goes to meet her in the subway, where the surrounding noises gradually turn into a blur and the frame tightens on him to convey both his distress and his powerlessness. (These feelings will continue to be conveyed during the film by John Taverner's cosmically aching score—a kind of low-level, horror-movie thrum.) Similarly, during a scene when Marcos is driving Ana home from the airport, all the sound is muted save for her gravelly alto, which serves to express both his obsession with her and his profound alienation not only from the world, from *her* world, but also from himself. And when we get a shot of the schleppey Marcos sitting alone, totally alien, in Ana's tastefully appointed apartment, what's suggested is the chasm that gapes between them and that is about to be bridged through violence. This

shot itself can be imagistically related to another one in which a nude Marcos is framed against a white wall, standing still and facing forward, looking for all the world like a distended Francis Bacon model.

As one can deduce from the above shot descriptions, the actors in *Battle in Heaven* don't so much give performances as they are used by Reygadas as units in a sort of visually stirring (im)morality play. In fact, they are all non-professionals, as were the performers in *Japón*. Marcos, we're told, is an actual chauffeur; and Ana is played, under an assumed name, by the daughter of a well-known Mexican family. Such non-professionalism has led to comparisons with Bresson that seem to me strained. For in his films Bresson wanted to supersede acting, which he loathed; Reygadas is more like the Italian neorealists, who wanted acting but from non-actors. Bresson's actors were models for his ideas, that is, whereas Reygadas's performers are individuals who are permitted to bring their own distinctive personalities to the screen—with the result that our perception of them is based not so much on any authorially predetermined, closed-off description of character as on our subjective response to their very presence or being, as it relates to the cinematic world that surrounds them. In effect, then, Reygadas puts us, as spectators, in Marcos's position, or the aesthetic equivalent of his position as he attempts to navigate his way through his changed, and changing, world.

In its treatment of the bizarre as commonplace, its blend of the ordinary and extraordinary into indiscriminating existence, *Battle in Heaven* eventually even spins a mild hypnosis on us. The very grotesquerie of this combination has an effect because, for all its marriage of the sententious to the ludicrous, it tells us that we are in the presence of a director of quite perceptible talent, who is intelligently disturbed by the state of his nation. After a while, we accept as well the very *longueurs* in this otherwise unlengthy film (at ninety-five minutes): the lengthy contemplation of the characters' faces or bodies, for example, which the cinematographer Diego Martínez Vignatti uses almost like rests in music. Contrast these shots, a number of them in extreme close-up, with Martínez Vignatti's beautiful yet paradoxically frightening long shots of Mexico City—grand or expansive images that themselves seem like achingly recited monologues, but which are nonetheless shot entirely in available light—and you'll get a good idea of the baroque tensions, the earthly-cum-epic oppositions, at work in *Battle in Heaven*. (In one of these wide, continuous shots with the city as a backdrop, we pass in Marcos's car from a run-down metropolitan area where people push carts alongside the road, to its polar opposite: another economic universe entirely, with lush green lawns, suburban stillness, and armed security guards who guide their employers from the comfort of their homes to the safety of their limousines.)

One of those tensions is extra-cinematic: I mean, how does a director engage individuals for roles like Marcos and Ana, since these people are not porn professionals? He must tell candidates, presumably unacquainted with each other, that they are to have various kinds of sex on camera, and I have to wonder what the conversations must have been like in which Reygadas convinced the real-life Marcos and Ana—Marcos Hernández and Anapola Mushkadiz—both to participate. Not to speak of the obese Mexican woman (Bertha Ruiz) with varicose veins, in addition to layer upon layer of flab, who plays Marcos's wife. Well, at least *Battle in Heaven* shows its sex in an unadorned, unromanticized manner, between the kinds of

characters who would never engage in such activity in a Hollywood movie (Ana, yes, but not with Marcos). In addition, the film disregards the double standard regarding male and female nudity, for here we get to see the genitalia of both genders, but particularly the male's, before as well as after sexual intercourse.

The final genre of my four genres-in-the-making is the terrorist film. Indeed, the terms "terrorism" and "terrorist" seem to be two of the most frequently used words in the English language. Every day we encounter them in the media as they are related to some disaster, recent or new. It would be spurious to sigh for a past that was always tranquil; nonetheless, we cannot help feeling that the world has become much more continually ravaged with violence than it ever has been before. And almost always it is principled violence, at least in the minds of the assailants. Nowhere are those principles more galvanic than in the work of the suicide bomber.

I want to concentrate here on this sub-genre of the terrorist film, rather than, say, terror-by-hostage-taking as treated not so long ago in Marco Bellocchio's *Good Morning, Night* (2003, about the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, former Italian prime minister and head of the Christian Democratic Party). And I will also leave aside such relatively recent big-budget terrorist films as Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006) and Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005), because their real subject is not the terrorist killers themselves but rather the havoc they wreak—and the vengeful, murderous, often melodramatic retribution they inspire.

No, my subject is a new one in the world of art: the suicide bomber himself—or herself. In film several years ago there were three such pictures released within months of each other: *Paradise Now* (2005), *The War Within* (2005), and *Day Night Day Night* (2006). The first two films wanted to transform the anonymous suicide bombers—in the first instance, two Palestinians, in the second, a Pakistani—that we read and hear about in news reports into fleshed-out individuals, tremulous yet consecrated. The directors of *Paradise Now* and *The War Within*—Hany Abu-Assad and Joseph Castelo, respectively—seem almost to have had in mind the following words of Ralph Waldo Emerson as they made their movies: "Great men, great nations, have . . . been perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it. Without an understanding informed by empathy, we are not manned to face the new world in which we find ourselves." Though both Abu-Assad and Castelo know that not many viewers will sympathize with their protagonists, they also know that it is possible to see such young men, despite the murders they commit, as still more members of the human race enmeshed in the coils of history.

Day Night Day Night, however, is in a way more daring than *Paradise Now* and *The War Within*, than the earlier Indian film *The Terrorist* (1999, dir. Santosh Sivan), or even John Updike's contemporaneous novel *The Terrorist* (2006), for that matter. For this picture does not explore political and social motives or spiritual consecration; indeed, it is almost completely uninterested in the reasons for its protagonist's behavior. *Day Night Day Night* merely and sheerly enters her state of mind as if it were entering a chamber, a ritual, a locus of possibility. Hence there can't really be any question of identifying, or not identifying, with this young woman. She *is*, we are, she *does*, and we watch her do it.

Day Night Day Night is the first fiction feature written and directed by Julia Loktev (who has also made a feature-length

documentary, *Moment of Impact* [1998]). The movie is divided into two parts: preparation and action. The first part, or half, has a visual and nearly silent quality that suggests an "interior" documentary about a person—in this case, a nineteen-year-old woman who is going to carry a bomb on her body. She is never given a name during the ninety-four minutes of this picture; and her intense, dark-eyed face (or that of the actress Luisa Williams, in her screen debut) itself contributes to her anonymity in its ethnic indistinctness, for she could be Middle Eastern, Russian, Mediterranean, or Latin American. Whatever her ancestry, she and most of the people with whom she is allied speak uninflected Northeastern American English.

We first see her carrying a bag and a tennis racquet. (Soon we understand that the racquet was intended to mislead anyone who might be watching.) She gets into a car and is driven by a tacit chauffeur to a motel in New Jersey; once in her shabby room, the chauffeur draws the curtain and leaves. The young woman says nothing when she is alone. She sleeps, then scrubs herself thoroughly. The next day, three hooded and masked men arrive, and, treating her most courteously, they prepare her for her job. We don't know yet definitely what it is, but we begin to suspect when the three men pray (a prayer in which their female accomplice does not join). She is carefully instructed in a false identity—name, address, family background, and so on; outfits are tried on and discarded until one is chosen. The woman then surrenders her cell phone. She is eventually led blindfolded from the motel to a secret location, where a yellow backpack containing explosives is strapped on her shoulders and she is shown how to detonate it.

Through all these proceedings the young woman is obedient and unquestioning. Then part two of *Day Night Day Night* begins, as she leaves her collaborators and enters Manhattan via the Port Authority Bus Terminal, where sound effectively enters the picture. The chaos as well as the claustrophobia of the city now intrudes, and she is jostled like the handheld camera that follows her along 42nd Street to Seventh Avenue. Colors intensify, while the soundtrack is abrasively jangling. Eventually, the woman makes her way by train to Times Square, where she intends to activate her bomb. On her way, in and out of the subway, commonplace things occur. She buys some pretzels, then a candied apple. She is neither blithe nor tense, showing no sense of approaching finality. She simply has stepped into this role of suicide bomber as she might have stepped into her clothes.

What is particularly chilling is that the woman seems to have accepted this task as a reasonable way to deal with problems of her own—problems only intimated by the unsettled emotional weather on her face, where determination, rage, uncertainty, bravado, modesty, and panic are among the feelings that flicker over her slightly feral features. (Once she murmurs something about "meeting him," but whether "him" is a man or a deity is not clear.) Toward the end, after a minor mishap with a young man who tries to pick her up, she tries to talk, via pay phone, with several people. They cannot be reached, but she is able to make a collect long-distance phone call to her parents, who sound like a typical, concerned middle-class mom and dad. Afterwards we see the lights of Manhattan against electrically starred skies. And then the picture abruptly ends—in Times Square.

Thus have Julia Loktev and Luisa Williams taken *Day Night Day Night* out of the realm of physical terror into conceptual abstraction. Their daring is that they do not explain: they show.

Their picture is a minimalistic distillation of a state, a condition, which could, if needed, be attached to one set or another of suicide-bomber motivations. Here, then, uncannily, is *das Ding an sich*—and all the more terrifying for it. Like their female bomber's victims, we are left not knowing precisely when a bomb, *this* bomb, will explode, or exactly why this woman has chosen to kill herself and others in such a way. This obviously is not traditional, character-driven empathy, but it is identification of a strangely perverse kind. For the film places us in the role of victim at the same time as it makes us witness to our victimizer. Now that's entertainment.

That brings an end to this particular genre-watch. As I conclude, I am reminded of the term "genre painting," which refers to a work that realistically depicts scenes or events from everyday life. It got that name, of course, because painting hadn't always so depicted human life. A Vermeer genre painting from the second half of the seventeenth century, for example, portrayed human figures of the lower orders, albeit anonymously; it treated them as types rather than unique personalities. Furthermore, the genre painter made no judgments: he was interested, above all, in the objective contemplation of everyday life. (That a seamstress, water girl, or lacemaker could become the subject of a genre painting is certainly not an indication of any improvement in the lot of the worker or peasant at the time; rather, such depiction was a signal of a curiosity on the part of the middle-to-upper classes about the daily lives of those beneath them, and—more important—a sign of the beginning of a desire on the part of early modern artists to embrace everyone and everything as their subject matter.

Oddly enough, each of the four otherwise "extreme" pictures under consideration here could be said to contemplate everyday life as well, though each (with the notable exception of *Woman Is the Future of Man*) of course implies some judgments. But they all have more or less ordinary people at their centers; all these figures are meant to be emblematic in addition to being "unique" or "individualized"; and the dailiness of everyday life in these movies remains "daily" even when it occurs in a death camp or a brothel instead of a restaurant, a bar, or a living room—sometimes remaining so to the point of dramatic (or should I say pictorial?) stasis. In other words, *Fateless*, *Woman Is the Future of Man*, *Battle in Heaven*, and *Day Night Day Night* are all essentially realistic or naturalistic films, whatever new genre each may be helping to forge and despite any temporal experimentation it may conduct. And I like the fact that, at least in painting—motion pictures, after all, are serial "paintings," or a succession of still images in motion, as their name indicates—the term genre is connected with such realistic or naturalistic representation.

It's as if, two centuries before the invention of cinema, and with it the ultimate incarnation of realism and naturalism as artistic styles, European genre painters, well, had envisioned the creation of the genre of genres: film, the democratic art as it were, which gives equal importance to every face, speaks the universal language of visual images, and puts all the world at every human being's disposal. In a world without technology, these painters naturally were not yet able to respond to the question, "In a world without film, what would you create?" as Michelangelo Antonioni did, with a single word: "Film." Seventeenth-century artists knew this word, too, but for them, paradoxically enough, it was only a layer of paint designed to cover up, cloud, or even obscure, unlike the pellucid film on which the genre art of today is printed—or, better, brought to light.

Rape, the Unspeakable War Crime

AN INTERVIEW WITH SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ
AND JUANITA WILSON ON THE AWARD-WINNING
FILMIC RENDITION OF **AS IF I AM NOT THERE**

by ALICE KUZNIAR



Natasha Petrovic starring in the lead role as Samira in *As if I am not there*.

In the following interview, conducted in March 2011 at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, acclaimed Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić discusses the filmic adaptation of her 2001 novel with its director and scriptwriter, the Irish filmmaker Juanita Wilson. Based on several real life stories, *As If I Am Not There* (published in the USA under the title *S: A Novel about the Balkans*) deals with the mass rape of women in 1992 in Bosnia during the war. Alice Kuzniar, Professor of German and English as well as Chair in Croatian Studies at the University of Waterloo, leads the discussion on the choices the novelist and filmmaker make in their respective media when they represent atrocities committed against women. Given the unspeakable nature of war rape, Wilson and Drakulić address their commitment to having such suffering recognized by the international community.

Even as late as 1994–96 when he was the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Justice Richard Goldstone assessed “Rape has never been the concern of the international community,” even though the 1949 Geneva Convention expressly prohibited wartime rape and enforced prostitution. There are two possible misperceptions behind this opinion: one, if rape is perceived as something personal and sexual, it is depoliticized. Two, women are seen as mere casualties of war, so that rapists are perceived as not having to be prosecuted in war crime tribunals.

However, a 2001 verdict by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) stipulated that rape and sexual enslavement were crimes against humanity, challenging the widespread acceptance of rape and sexual enslavement of women as intrinsic part of war. ICTY found three Bosnian Serb men guilty of rape of women and girls (some as young as 12 and 15 years of age), in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore two of the men were found guilty of the crime against humanity of sexual enslavement. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped in the war in Bosnia. *As If I Am Not There* tells the story of these events through the eyes of one woman’s horrific experiences.

Born in Croatia in 1949, Drakulić is one of Europe's foremost women authors. She has published in *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Book Review*, and *The Nation*. Her writings include *How we Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (1991), *Cafe Europa: Life After Communism* (1996), *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in the Hague* (2005), and *Frida's Bed* (2008). Her most recent work, *A Guided Tour through the Museum of Communism* (2011), is a series of fables told from the perspective of various animals. In the words of historian Timothy Snyder it "beautifully renders the dilemmas of life under Communism as sharp instances of moral tragedy. . . . Literature here is an aide-mémoire, not just of historical experience, but of why we choose to forget" (jacket cover).

For her filmic rendition of *As If I Am Not There* (2010), writer and director Juanita Wilson was named in 2011 as one of *Variety's* "Top Ten Directors to Watch," the only woman on the list. *As If I Am Not There* recently received three Irish Film and Television awards for Best Film, Director and Script, in addition to awards at international festivals in Phoenix, Long Island, Rhode Island, Istanbul, and Seattle. Wilson's short film *The Door* (2009) was nominated for an Academy Award for best live-action short film. *As If I Am Not There* is her first feature film. In Ireland and the UK, it has been released by Element Films.

KUZNIAR: Slavenka, at the start of your novel you cite Primo Levi, the Holocaust survivor and writer, as saying: "but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not there." One can understand the title of the novel in various ways, first and foremost, that S. has to disassociate herself cognitively from the events occurring to her, so that she can survive. She has to tell herself, this isn't happening to me. But the Primo Levi quotation suggests something quite different: that the listener of his tale does not want to know his story. In what sense has S.'s story been suppressed until you came to write it? Explain to us how you came by the information to write this real-life story of S. What motivated you to write her story?

DRAKULIĆ: It's very simple. I was living in Zagreb when the first women were exchanged for imprisoned soldiers and the first camps for refugees were set up in Zagreb neighborhoods. Many journalists and women's groups started to collect documentation about these rapes. Immediately there was awareness that they should be documented. Very soon it became clear that the numbers were on a huge scale. To be sure, rapes happen in every war, but the scale of these ones, once they were discovered, was extraordinary. What was remarkable, too, is that, although many of these women were from remote areas (and you would not expect that these women would speak openly about these kinds of things), it turned out to be a political issue for them. These women felt instinctively that it was their revenge to say who the perpetrators were.

So after I heard about this, I went around to these camps and talked to the women, not intending to write a book or novel. My first idea was that their stories needed to be documented and maybe published as a book of documents. Now, as a journalist you write in all possible forms: I wrote reportages, interviews, and comments. But after a while, the public doesn't want to take it in any longer, so you come to ask how you can move people to empathize. More than anything else, it is a matter of empathy. I realized that the testimonies were very similar, somehow almost interchangeable, and, after a while, after reading five or six, you become more and more distanced because you cannot take reading them anymore. Moreover, these accounts never tell you any details or feelings. A book of documents makes sense for someone who wants to record these events, but for somebody who wants to write about these rapes, a compilation doesn't make such sense. So I was left with this book which was not a book, with material that was burden-

ing me emotionally, and for next ten years I did nothing. I just left it there you know, so... that's how I came about it. Of course, I was engaged in journalism at the time and published comments all over the western world; it was good that women were talking to journalists, to let them discover how widespread the rapes were. This led to the conclusion later on that it wasn't an issue of power or sex or anything like that. Rape is an instrument of ethnic cleansing.

I wrote about the "Foča case" (a town in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina) of the first group of men who were tried and sentenced for rape as a crime against humanity in my book, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly*. These three men just couldn't believe what was happening to them. In their culture and in their surroundings, to rape a woman was nothing. They defended themselves by saying that they actually saved the lives of these girls. How? They kept them in some kind of a brothel. Of course they abused them, but the girls remained alive. They wanted to say, "I was a master of life and death over these women but I didn't use that power. I could have killed them but I did not. They were alive thanks to me." This was their defense, as absurd it sounds. They received very high sentences, even higher than many who were murderers and war criminals in the sense of killing and executing people or ordering them to be killed. Their sentencing was really exemplary.

KUZNIAR: Tell us about how you came then, Juanita, to select this novel for your first feature film.

WILSON: I came across the book in a bookshop in Dublin and recalled my experience of reading about the war and hearing about the women being kept in rape camps, and, as an Irish person, feeling frustrated that nobody seemed able to help them. I tried imagining how they might feel—having to cope day in and day out, seeing the door to your room open, and fearing you'll be taken out and maybe killed. So, the book fell into my hands and I literally read it in one sitting. I think it's an incredible book, and the content is something that you don't want to have to experience. It was written in a way that was completely compelling, insofar as you can enter the head of the character, she explained all her thoughts, you can feel how she felt. It was beautifully, sparingly written. It just felt very true for me. There were aspects in the book, which I hadn't ever heard before which completely rang true. For instance, when fear induces a kind of numbness and a shutting down of emotion rather than the production of adrenaline, which is what you normally expect. This explains how men with guns could take



Freedom at last: crossing the mountains into Croatia.

over a whole village of a two hundred people. Yet you ask, "Why couldn't they just fight?" The other thing I think was very true to life was that there was no instinct of solidarity between the women: because they came from different situations and they didn't know each other, there was no automatic "we're all in this together." Instead, each night each girl wondered, "When they come, will they come for me?" You hope that you can survive and realize you can't help anybody else. Nor can you think about the past or the future. You have to focus on just what's in front of you at the moment. For me, it was an incredible book that tells of some of the most awful things that we do to each other as human beings. But it also talks about the power of love at the end of the day and the strength of love to overcome all evil, to be able to continue, and to give this love to a baby. For me, the way that Slavenka wrote the novel as much as its content really made the subject important.

DRAKULIĆ: I just want to add something à propos emotions. I left all the documentation in the back of my mind. It was too difficult to think about, to deal with it, yet I was bothered by why I was not able to do something with it. I realized that there were no emotions in the statements by the women I interviewed. Almost no one described how she felt afterwards and, indeed, in trauma literature you learn that victims are not capable of articulating what they have just been through and how they feel. So I felt that where they stopped talking, I should start writing: I should lend them my voice in terms of expressing their emotions and pain. I then tried to put myself in their place, to use my imagination, and to describe their fears and feelings. This is also what Juanita beautifully did, as well as the actress, Natasha Petrović, who's absolutely wonderful in expressing feelings only with her face.

KUZNIAR: Slavenka, in the novel you write, "Words become superfluous because they can no longer express reality. Reality escapes the words we know, and we simply lack new words to encapsulate this new experience." The challenge of the novel is to put into words that for which we do not have a vocabulary, to dare putting such experiences into words. At the same time, the risk is that words may be untrue to such an experience. Juanita can you talk about "wordlessness" in your film and how it is important to you? How do you respond to this paradox of

the impossibility of representing such horrors? For instance, you must mention Natasha Petrović: it struck me watching the film for a second time that you begin almost every sequence by focusing on her face, after which the camera pans, so as to disclose what she's responding to. Could you address wordlessness and the dilemma it presents to you as a filmmaker?

WILSON: There is so much complexity in the book. Because you're in the character's head, you know exactly what she's thinking all the time. I considered using a voice over and using a lot of her thoughts directly. But, it just felt like too much—someone's going through a difficult situation and they're talking at the same time. So I chose the style of letting the character go on her journey and the audience discovering things as she discovers it. You can read the human face, there's nothing more dramatic than the human face. You can read so much of emotion there if you just allow the actors to do their job. In terms of cinema, there is great power in not telling people everything. You show things rather than tell people what's going on. My producer James Flynn felt the whole film could be silent, and apart from the captain's words there's little dialogue. I remember talking to somebody who had been in a camp and they talked about this language of looks: they couldn't speak but they'd transmit everything just through different looks. In many cases the women were in shock and were not going to be able to express what they were feeling. I found I could still tell the story and tell it much more powerfully without the words.

KUZNIAR: What else did you decide to leave out? Or what else did you include in terms of adapting the book?

WILSON: When I read the book, so many things had such an impact that instantly I felt they should be there. They just marked me almost. With respect to what I left out: with a book, you can put it down, walk away, and come back. With a film you can't do that. While people say this film is hard to watch, I feel it could've been a lot harder. We decided certain events that happened in the book were too upsetting on film and we decided to keep the focus on just one character. There were other characters in the book whose evolving stories you learn about. We just couldn't keep all of that. But I always wanted to

remain true to the spirit of the novel and not change anything of any significance unless I genuinely felt that on-screen it might work better in a slightly different way. I really tried to remain faithful to the actual book itself.

DRAKULIĆ: You mentioned wordlessness and how difficult it is to put fear and pain—or what make you paralyzed—into words. Pain reduces you to a stage before language. So what do you do when you're in pain is scream. You're like a child: you don't know the language for pain. It reduces you to a pre-verbal stage. My guiding line, then, was to give words to wordlessness. In *Frida's Bed*, for example, Frida Kahlo found a way to express pain in her paintings. I imagine that it's much easier to express your pain in pictures, but to give words to pain is very difficult because you don't have the language. You're dealing with material that can almost never be dealt with. So when you try to articulate it you really are facing a challenge.

KUZNIAR: In the case of post-traumatic stress syndrome, you have to revisit things and work through them, especially by verbalizing them, because at the time you were paralyzed and you were unable to react the way you probably wanted to.

DRAKULIĆ: Yes, like fighting back.

KUZNIAR: One of the other symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome is involuntary memory. At the beginning of the novel, S. is lying in the hospital in Stockholm and revisits the moment when the door to her apartment was kicked open. She says, "I go back to that moment for the nth time, and I'm still not sure that I understand how it all happened." One could say that the novel (and the film) take as their very structure this circular pattern of memory—they both start with the end and go back in time. But memory (and the effort to disassociate oneself from it) arguably plays a more important part of the novel. How were you able to find an equivalent in the cinematic medium, Juanita?

WILSON: In a way, the whole film is a flashback. It starts at the beginning with the birth of the baby and how she got into that position and at the end you arrive back at that dilemma. Initially I wanted to include some other flashbacks, but it felt unnatural with the realistic style of the film, such that the flashbacks almost took you of it. It seemed better once you were in the camp, to stay there, and not to go to other parts of her life. A lot of the time in the book she is thinking about her past, trying to rationalize her situation, and you can't show that, you can't just show her thinking unless you use a flashback.

KUZNIAR: Images of the repulsive have a fascinating allure, especially if they are sexualized. How did you prevent that response in your viewer? For instance, could you talk about how you decided to shoot the rape scene?

WILSON: It was really important not to sugarcoat or gloss over anything, but at the same time I didn't want to show any explicit nudity or be voyeuristic in any way, which is very difficult. So I tried not to show anything that you don't need to see and to portray the experience of rape from her point of view—not just to document the facts. So we stay on her face for most of the scene. We see her trying to block it out by focusing on a little detail, in this case a fly, which is in the book as well. This

strategy works for a little while for her but, at a certain point, it gets to be too much and she has an out-of-body experience, which is true to any trauma experience where you feel it's not happening to you but it's happening to somebody else and you can see it happening from a distance. The effect in the film is slightly eerie because you're leaving cold, hard reality and going into another realm.

KUZNIAR: I want to talk about the ending. Among the many shocking moments in the novel is when S. says "This is war, inside her, in her own womb." One of the purposes in the rape of Bosnian women is, within the system of patrilineage, to produce Serbian offspring, and hence the war can be seen to be continuing in her womb. But when we live in a society where pregnancy is so revered, for S. to equate pregnancy with death and war is a sacrilege. Yet you decided to end the novel on a note of hope and reconciliation, Slavenka—and Juanita you are true to the novel in this. But doesn't this closure take back the revulsion S. previously felt—and understandably felt? To be polemic, doesn't the ending suggest her previous reaction to her pregnancy was somehow wrong? How would women who decided to terminate pregnancy feel about this ending?

DRAKULIĆ: They are going to bring Serbian babies into the world—or Croatian or Muslim babies (but there were far fewer instances of these rapes). Muslim women would bring up Serbian boys. That was the idea.

KUZNIAR: Surely many women decided to terminate pregnancies.

DRAKULIĆ: Probably many of them did. I don't know for sure. But this character is confronted with the dilemma: How am I going to bring up my son? Am I going to bring him up as a Serb, in which case the aim of the soldiers would be fulfilled? Or am I going to bring him up as part of my nation, whatever that may be. Is it a happy ending? It's hard to judge.

As to this opening and closing scene where she is washing herself in the shower, I just now remember where it came from. Among the first rape victims was a married woman with two children whose husband was away in the Bosnian army. She said the worst thing was not that they raped her, but that they raped her on her marital bed. It was a desecration of her marriage and her marital status. And then this woman described to me that she didn't allow her children to touch her and she didn't touch her children for more than a month. She isolated herself and, as in a rite of purification, was washing herself constantly. She didn't come close to the children because she felt so dirty and polluted that she couldn't allow them to touch her. So the washing scene comes from that.

WILSON: I found the end very moving because she realized that this baby represents not just the enemy but her only surviving family member. I tried to show through the photos of the family, that she made the decision to keep the child because of her family. Her decision to nurse the baby was not simply mother nature; nor does she forget what happened, for then the soldiers are also allowed to forget what they did and she didn't want that. So in the end she decided she wouldn't just forget: she would take the baby and bring it up and find a way to explain what had happened. I think the ending does offer hope. The human spirit is strong.

DRAKULIĆ: To return to the issue of national identity for a moment. This child is a product of a mixture, which I think most of us are—a product of some kind of mixture—so that, symbolically speaking, PURE ethnicity is just nonsense. You evoke purity of the race or of the nation only when you need it for something ideological. National identity is a construction; you evoke it for a special purpose.

KUZNIAR: The aim of the Serbian soldiers is to humiliate the women, to make everyone in the camp look and feel alike, as if robbed of their personality. Slavenka, was this your goal in naming S. only by a letter? Why doesn't she have a name?

DRAKULIĆ: As soon as you enter the camp you are not a person any longer. Your personality is erased. Your identity does not exist any longer. Your gender matters in this situation. Your nationality matters, but not your identity.

KUZNIAR: So why, with regards to ethnicity, Juanita why were you not explicit about the national or political affiliation of the soldiers? Why did you resist emphasizing nationality in your rendition of this story? Does the larger question of responsibility cut across national and religious distinctions, whether these are between Serbs and Bosnians, between Croats and Bosnians, between Croats and Serbs, or between Christians and Muslims.

WILSON: I'm obviously not from there, so I feel as if I can't ever fully tell the story of that war but just the particular story of a woman. You would hope that audience members, if they're interested, would inform themselves and learn the facts, rather than just being told it all in one film.

DRAKULIĆ: I have to say that in the book it's very clear that the victims are Muslim, Bosniak women and also who the perpetrators are. But I thought my task was not to judge them. On the contrary my task is to show human nature and what the women went through. History will tell who the perpetrators were—or who the most perpetrators were, for, as I said, rape was committed on all sides. I think that, if you put ideology into a novel, then you're in another field and I never wanted to do that. I have other means of polemicizing in my journalism and I often do that, but in my novels I try to keep away from all kind of ideology.

KUZNIAR: With regards to the casting, were you worried about having a beautiful woman in the role of Samira?

WILSON: It's funny because when I met Natasha, I was casting for about nine months and I had been looking for the right combination of characteristics: somebody who is young but is smart enough to work things out. In terms of her beauty, she has to be strong enough that the captain would notice her; attractive enough that he would want to have her. Yet at the beginning of the film, she's almost a kid. You wouldn't necessarily pick her out of a crowd, but at times she can look incredibly beautiful. She has that versatility to be both. I auditioned a lot of people to be both but obviously I didn't want to cast someone who would be beautiful in the way that you mention. Natasha just has a strong presence on the screen and that's going to be important.

DRAKULIĆ: What I care about is not whether she was beauti-

ful or not but that she's urban. She's urban because the images conveyed by the media were of very old, peasant woman, covering their heads with handkerchiefs. But I knew that the woman raped included educated, urban women. The story with the captain actually comes from one woman who was maybe 30 years old at the time, and she was a lawyer.

What I like about Natasha as an actress or the way Juanita treated her is that she's very beautiful, but she doesn't have this accent on sexuality. She's just a skinny girl who has something very beautiful in her look. I couldn't imagine a better actress.

KUZNIAR: Could you say a word about your choice of music for the film?

WILSON: Music is such a big thing in film. If your ears listen, your eyes stop watching as intensely. Initially, we included more music than there is now but realized we didn't need it. So we brought the sound way down and used silence at key dramatic moments. Music is used instead for transitions. For instance, going from the village to the warehouse there's a piece of music there. It lets you process what you've just seen. There's a space. When she leaves the camp there's music again, and when the women run down the hill. In most cases, the music isn't overtly dramatic, because I hate it when a film uses music to tell you how to feel. I resist it immediately.

The composer, Kiril Dzajkovski, is from Macedonia and he's mostly known for his modern dance music, where he weaves in ethnic overtones. I wanted something contemporary because the story is about an urban woman. I always wanted Kiril, I heard his music from one of the first times I went there.

KUZNIAR: What has been the reaction to your work? Have you heard responses back from the woman whose lives are represented in some fashion here?

DRAKULIĆ: I have not spoken to these women after I moved on to other subjects. But an association of women from Sarajevo who were victims of war published a book of documents six or seven years ago and sent it to me with a dedication, thanking me for the work that I had done for them. But I have also to say that some of my male colleagues from Bosnia were not very pleased that I, not being Bosnian and not being subject to rape, dared to write such a book. Behind their objections is the idea that only victims have right to tell their own stories. But is it really only the victim who can tell the story? And then, what if she cannot tell the story? What if she can tell the story only in a way that is not meaningful? I think these colleagues felt a little bit possessive about the subject—only we Bosniaks can write about our experience of the war. But why didn't they? Why didn't the victims write? Why didn't my colleagues take up that issue?

I have one final remark. I got an email from a judge who was appointed by the ICTY to come to Bosnia and teach judges there about war crimes and how to handle war crimes because when the court in Hague closes down, maybe in a year or two, the local juridical system will have to deal with their own war criminals. They are going to show this film as educational material for the judges who are going to try war crimes, which I thought was a badge of honor for Juanita.

WILSON: I was so happy about that.

THE TROTSKY

A CLAIM TO COMMUNITY

by AMIR KHAN

A distinction between an earlier and later Charles Taylor might be drawn between Charles Taylor the political activist versus Charles Taylor the intellectual.¹ Certainly the nature of the writing going on in a political tract like *The Pattern of Politics* (1970)² is at removes from intellectual forays into the malaise of modernity or the crisis of the self and identify. I won't attempt to square what an earlier Taylor says with a later Taylor. But Taylor's politics were local enough in the 1960s to make a book he wrote during that time pertinent to what I want to say about *The Trotsky* (2009), a film shot entirely in Montreal and engaged in its own way with "radical" Canadian politics. I am not applying a Taylorian reading to the film than suggesting that the film itself is a reading of this particular political text of Taylor's—that the movie ingests and thereby depicts some of its most pertinent lessons. Even if a later Taylor does not square with an earlier Taylor, what *The Trotsky* attempts is to make something like the politics of polarization matter once again, which is to say it attempts to reclaim some of the lessons put forward in *The Pattern of Politics*. One could also say this film attempts to reclaim the dialectic, in particular the notion that holds conflict (between clearly opposing viewpoints) as the lynchpin of social change. How the film reinterprets the dialectic will be considered here.

The premise of the film that a young Montreal teenager, Leon Bronstein (Jay Baruchel), believes himself to be the living embodiment of Leon Trotsky reincarnated suggests it is not beyond the pale to think about things like having another's soul occupy one's body, and, from there, to consider whether the ontology of film facilitates a discussion of reincarnation (another's soul trapped in a body eerily present to us) or rather, something like the reverse (a different body occupying another's soul). I raise these examples in consideration of the ontological differences between what Cavell calls, simply, the "actor" (stage actor) and the "performer" (screen actor).

The [stage] actor's role is his subject for study, and there is no end to it. But the screen performer is essentially not an actor at all: he is the subject of study, and a study not his own. (That is what the content of a photograph is—its subject.) On a screen the study is projected; on a stage the actor

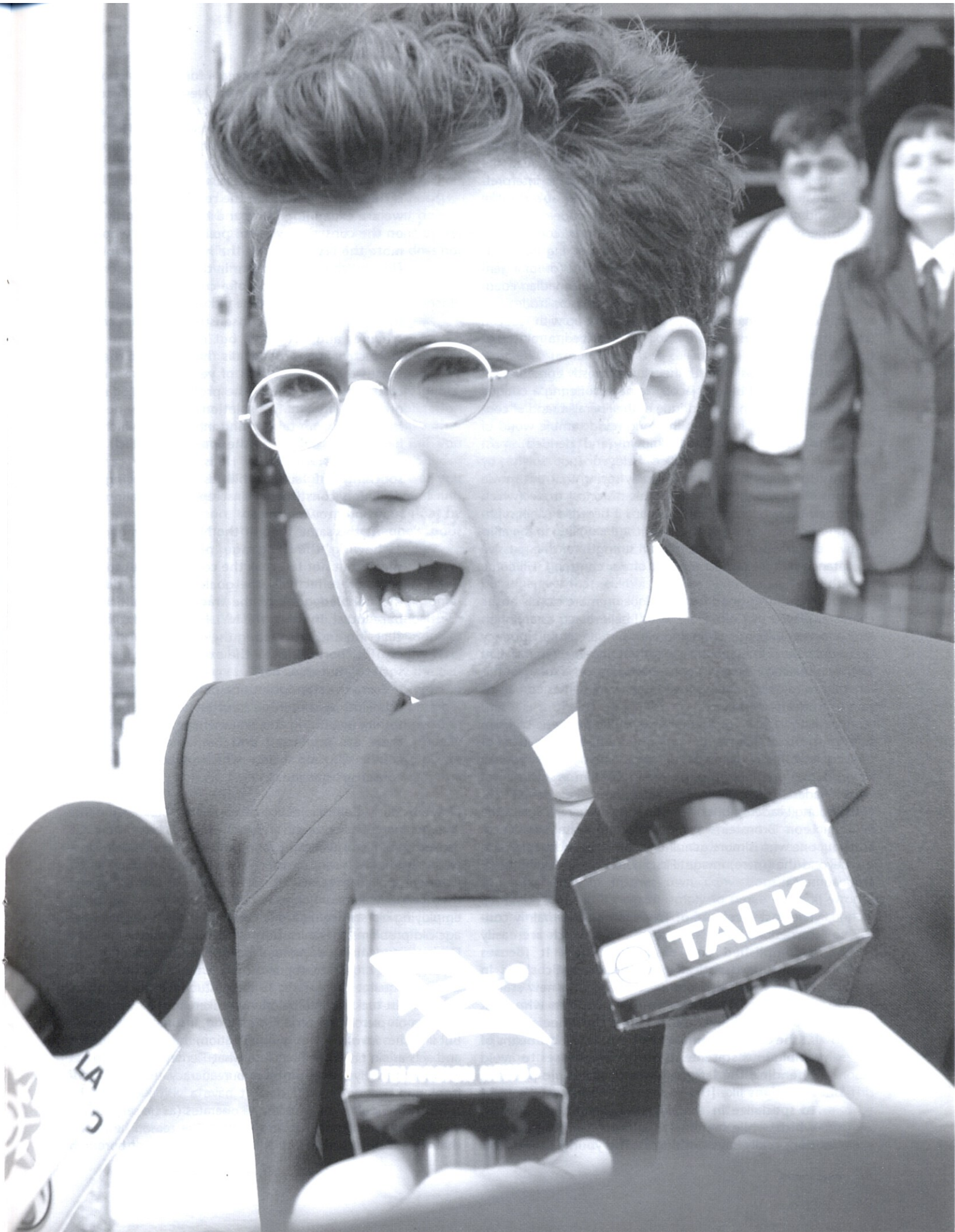
is the projector. An exemplary stage performance is one which, for a time, most fully creates a character. After Paul Scofield's performance in *King Lear*, we know who King Lear is, we have seen him in the flesh. An exemplary screen performance is one in which, at a time, a star is born. After *The Maltese Falcon*, we know a new star, only distantly a person. "Bogart" means "the figure created in a given set of films." His presence in those films is who he is, not merely in the sense in which a photograph of an event is that event; but in the sense that if those films did not exist, Bogart would not exist, the name "Bogart" would not mean what it does.³

If it's true that an actor on screen, when he plays a character, imbues that character with something of his presence—so that there is no Rambo, say, without Sylvester Stallone, and, subsequently, no role for Sylvester Stallone to play without invoking a bit of Rambo in it—then the creation of a film star means the creation of a persona, which functions something like a sign, with its own cluster of clues and associations. The individuality of the screen actor is either lost or heightened, depending on how you view things. Lost in that there is no appearance or presence the actor can (now or ever) have without calling to mind the medium he works in. Heightened in that something of what he is *is* (fundamentally) more open to the senses; the screen actor is more transparent to us, which also can be a way of cloaking things. But sometimes, once we appear on screen, just as once we utter language, we are committed persons.

To rehash ground already traveled by Cavell, let me say that the theatre actor, say, Ian McKellen, does not transfigure who we understand Richard III to be. McKellen interprets the character. Another could interpret differently, but we imagine the character, Richard III, to be a stable entity. But the screen actor does not *interpret* his role. He inhabits it so there is no role without the actor. Conventionally speaking, one does not "interpret" Rambo.

It is not unwise to suppose that a film director is aware of his inheritance in the actors and actresses he has sovereignty over, particularly Jacob Tierney, a man well versed in the histrionics of

Leon Bronstein performs his conviction in *The Trotsky*.



what we might nowadays call 1960s (Canadian) "counterculture," autotyping a film explicitly aimed at the youth of Canada. Whether or not Pierre Trudeau is a galvanizing figure for *today's* youth or not, those who are curious to know him are likely to know him through Colm Fiore. I don't mean that Fiore's persona trumps Trudeau's. Indeed, Fiore interprets Trudeau the way a stage actor interprets a character. But Fiore, in interpreting Trudeau, is interpreting a star, or, say, Trudeau's star-like quality and *not* a character. To play the role of Trudeau, he must get his persona to match Trudeau's. Others may come along, not with "different" interpretations, but something like "better" impersonations.⁴ Yet for a generation at least (or for a generation of Canadian youth interested in 1960s Canadian counterculture *now*), simply by having appeared to us as Trudeau *on screen*, Fiore's persona will invoke or be caught up with Trudeau (though not vice versa). Fiore is, or has achieved, a reincarnation of Trudeau.

In casting Fiore as a rather ineffective (mostly comedic) villain in *The Trotsky*, I believe Jacob Tierney is offering a critique of Trudeau in this film, so a critique of the liberal⁵ brand of consensus politics that undercuts the rough and tumble world of adversarial intellectual pursuit—known (and derided) most famously as that darling artifice beloved (not solely) by Marxists: the dialectic. I am not exactly saying that this movie redeems the intellectual worth of this historical trope (which has largely gone out of favour). Perhaps it begs the (philosophical) question of where exactly its worth (if any) lies: in the affirmative declaration of philosophical strength or the passive acceptance of forces (precisely) out of our control. I will come back to this.

We can begin, in good form, by looking more closely at the character played by Colm Fiore, who I believe acts as an inheritance for Jacob Tierney, bringing with him a cultural currency that could be put to good use considering the type of film Tierney is making. The question is, does Tierney, *in fact*, put this inheritance to good (or any) use? Is he aware he has cast a version of Trudeau in his film?

Appealing to "vulgar" intentionality stifles aesthetic criticism so even if you answer no, I am going to argue that Tierney, at the very least, forces us to consider what type of leader Trudeau is and not by presenting Colm Fiore in this film as a version of what Charles Taylor calls Trudeau in his book (i.e., the NYL, or "New Young Leader"), but by presenting another version of the NYL in Leon Bronstein—say a polar opposite version to Trudeau, one who is more genuinely what we expect an NYL to be, beyond the (mere) image. First, here is Taylor's critique of Trudeaumania:

The vast literature of Trudeaumania is mainly concerned with the surface changes which are easily accomplished and easily identified. It focuses almost narcissistically on the dramatic shifts in image which accompany the rise of a new star ...

There is another type of politician who is ... thought to be obsolete. This is the wheeler-dealer ... the consensus-maker who operates, by means of ambiguous statements and compromises to avoid offending the largest number of people possible. Politicians like [the consensus-maker] are thought to specialize in the skilled parliamentary answer, which, while seeming to address itself to the question, really says nothing ... The young believe this

way of operating is a formula for lack of action.

Against this the NYL—the New Young Leader—is said to be attuned and responsive to the issues which preoccupy young urban dwellers. He is said to have the courage to dispense with the double-talk and circumlocution of the Old Guard ...

All this may have little relation to reality, but it is the myth rather than the reality of the NYL that we are examining here; and this myth firmly rests on the consensus view of politics. Those who promote the NYL make up the highly successful new élite ... What they look for in the NYL is the crystallization and expression of a consensus...

What is wrong with the old wheeler-dealer is not that he creates a consensus with his careful schemes and hedgings, but rather that he is an ineffective agent of it. He is "hung up" on the consensus-making problems of yesteryear, so that he can neither see clearly the problems of today nor grasp the imaginative solutions which are needed. He suffers from taboos and inhibitions which may have been politic in the past but which have become obstacles today. He is, therefore, carefully soothing the susceptibilities of an aging and declining constituency instead of appealing to a new and growing one.

At the same time, if the NYL is courageous in eschewing the language of equivocation, he speaks out not to break the consensus but to present more effectively the goals that are hidden in the gobbledygook of the traditional politician or bureaucrat. In short, the NYL is supposed to be discovering and articulating the demands of the society. He "personifies all the exciting changes in our society." But does he?

From the standpoint of a politics of polarization, this kind of reasoning is utter nonsense. What is totally missing in the argument is any inkling that there are important and fundamental structural conflicts in our society which make any claim to consensus specious.⁶

Now obviously Colm Fiore's *character* (Henry Berkhoff) in *The Trotsky* is *not* a version of the NYL, not meant to be nor to recall the image of Pierre Trudeau (Colm Fiore's persona aside). What Henry Berkhoff is meant to convey is certainly something of the "old-style political figure,"⁷ if not exactly a "wheeler-dealer," then certainly someone who is out of touch with the youth, employing old style remedies to curb (what he perceives to be) age-old problems. He unleashes his "demonic concubine" Ms. Davis on students on day one of classes; her old school British-marm-accent is over the top and complements the rather arbitrary and quaint charges she levels at students. Muddy shoes and no-shirt-tuck seem to be offenses taken from a bygone era. Harping on piercings is a bit more fitting, if somewhat clichéd. But if clichés involve a lack of imagination, then clichéd speech and acts are in order here because what Tierney is trying to get across is precisely the blandness of bureaucracy, the *lack* of confrontation. Henry Berkhoff doesn't have a vision of what he wants his school to be. Instead, he operates (as he sees it) in a vacuum between boredom and apathy. The reason he denies that the problem with youth today could be one of boredom

(favouring instead the interpretation of apathy) is because if this were so, the onus would be on him to conjure up or conceive of a vision that would pull students out of boredom. Whereas the "fight" against apathy is not a fight at all, not confrontational. Nothing is at stake. Berkhoff is able to implement a supposed program of discipline and punishment not by virtue of his (or Ms. Davis's) iron will but because, for students, no alternative is yet available. Leon refers to them both as "fascists," which may simply allude to the fact that all Berkhoff does is offer up the same prescriptive dogma from a time gone by. He is more a disciplinary relic than an adversarial man. He does not inspire conflict, the sort required for real change to happen. Only Leon Bronstein does this. Listen to Berkhoff's hackneyed phrasings as he admonishes Leon for his display of solidarity with Skip:

This has been a troubled arts school for many years now. Pot, sex, graffiti, piercings. You see what I'm getting at? I am here to discipline the students, usher in a new era of responsibility and obligation to this place. Now you can certainly make that harder for me. Heck, you already have. But you won't stop me. So the choice is yours. You can spend your final year of high school in a war you can't win against a man who's lived far longer and knows far more than you. Or you can just float by and wreak havoc next year on someone's poor unsuspecting university. What's it going to be?

To which Leon replies: "I think the choice is obvious." If this sounds confrontational, it is because Leon has made confrontation his prerogative. Berkhoff is happy to let things "float by." According to Taylor, it is not by virtue of (differing) philosophies that we distinguish the old-style wheeler dealer from the NYL, but by virtue of *effectiveness*. That is, the NYL is simply the *better* consensus-maker, more in tune with the "correct" forces in society to be placated. Placation, however, is still his prerogative. So Colm Fiore in this movie is not Pierre Trudeau personified (i.e. "persona"-fied), but something like Pierre Trudeau exposed. That is, both Trudeau and Berkhoff came into power on the promise of radical change; both offer up instead "the same old shit."⁸

So in what way is Leon Bronstein a more genuine NYL? In one sense he isn't an NYL at all. Taylor uses the term pejoratively so part of what makes an NYL is precisely his disingenuousness. A "genuine" NYL would be a contradiction because all an NYL is capable of is presenting political measures or manoeuvres designed to maintain the status quo in the guise of supposedly radical change. No one in this film offers radical change except Leon, and he certainly does not couch his feelings. (Berkhoff, even if considered "radical," wants to maintain the status quo; he does not couch this.) As far as the political landscape depicted in the film goes, the liberal consensus-maker (Taylor's NYL) is squeezed out. If the film is indeed a critique of so-called "consensus politics," it is so by virtue of omission because no character in the film embodies the ethos of the liberal politician. The value of such omission is that it allows polarization to happen, to have the stakes presented (clearly) as well as the possibility of choice.

How to make the case that the film offers a critique of a character it does not even depict? One way might be to say that the consensus model of politics, however effective (or inef-

fective), is certainly not the stuff of drama—that conflict (necessarily) is. Posing the question this way is an indirect way of critiquing such a model, particularly if one expects the stuff of politics to be dramatic, i.e., to involve real stakes. So why should conflict work so well on film but not in life (or, at least, in politics)?⁹ There are obvious psychological reasons, like the fact that when watching film, we are absent from the conflict whereas in life, the possibility of being harmed—physically, psychically—is prevalent. But effective consensus politics is more than a means, merely, of papering over the treacheries of real life. The need to *believe* is pertinent; yet what chance does belief stand in the consensus model of politics? To say it is ultimately quashed means that belief must be *exploited* by the liberal politician. This is what Taylor reminds us the "cult of the NYL" taps into—the people's "yearning to be in contact with something meaningful,"¹⁰ and their desire to participate in the structures surrounding this so-called "significant reality," principally through the act of voting.¹¹ This desire in itself is not problematic. It is the liberal manipulation of belief through consensus that troubles Taylor.

Here are two ways Leon Bronstein breaks with Taylor's model of the NYL. First, Leon himself does not seek out, or seek to present himself as being in connection with, a significant reality. He *already knows* he is the reincarnation of Leon Trotsky. The movie does not depict him coming to this claim (or even doubting/disinheriting this knowledge), but merely the consequences of his knowing. This is a significant departure from the traditional model of the NYL who himself does not believe in anything. He may *mediate* a connection to some higher reality, but whatever that reality is is always negotiable, hence founded on a stance of unbelief; whereas Leon Bronstein's point of departure is precisely his belief.

Nor is it true that Leon wins, or has any particular desire to win, others to his cause. In fact, the final conversion of Leon's schoolmates is not initiated by him, but by his chief-lieutenant, Tony. Attempting to convince a sceptical gathering of students that it is in their best interest to express solidarity with Leon, Tony does not berate them with dogma; he merely forces them to face the abyss and then to choose. If Leon and Tony eventually inspire others to believe in the meaningfulness of another reality, it is not because they have given them the tenets of Marxism to behold, but because the students become convinced of the value (either banally or profoundly) of a *voice*—symbolized in this film with the achievement of a union, i.e., a political mechanism that allows students to have a say in the day-to-day running of affairs that should concern them. So only someone clear in his/her own convictions (Tony too is admirably clear in his desire simply to prove Berkhoff wrong) can pave the way for conviction in others—not conviction to take up another's cause, but to participate and to speak out for oneself.

Second, it is of utmost significance that the film does not portray the act of voting and is selective in its commentary on what sorts of rebellion are in order. The film depicts the signing of a petition, which proves ineffective; also, a school walk-out, equivalent perhaps to a strike, which also peters out. Is Tierney commenting on the effectiveness of petitions and strikes by showing us their futility in this film? Does this mean we should forgo petitions and strikes to achieve the change we want? This film is saying that rebellion, or acts of rebellion, can also be standardized, can become clichéd, hence rendered ineffective. Simply to take up a ready-made remedy is not an effective



Leon Bronstein as an agent of the dialectic in *The Trotsky*.

means for change. What is required is the conviction behind the remedy so that standing up in acts of defiance is not a political act with any meaning unless accompanied by convictions. And the best way to prove one's convictions, to avoid the blasé rebellion that comes with staged political acts would be to take up more arresting measures, as though there is no reason to be taken seriously otherwise, which means we have no voice otherwise. This is dangerous territory, particularly when one begins taking hostages (i.e., breaking the law) in the name of one's convictions. The dramatic hostage-taking of Berkhoff, in spur-of-the-moment fashion, accompanied by frenzied text-messaging to get students to rally in solidarity with Bronstein's crazy act of defiance not only says something about the value of improvisation but also, about the types of rebellion that are, perhaps not in order, but (now?) necessary.¹²

I turn now to a consideration of the dialectic, and how this film inherits and transfigures what is meant by the term. Leon

provides a brief aside (to Alexandra) on how he views the "Great Dialectic," or "Grand Narrative,"¹³ before going on to paraphrase Eagleton's distinction between moral and moralistic thinking.¹⁴ The dialectic must "breathe" in the new century, he says, "by allowing for things which Karl Marx, frankly, had no opinion on." This is less a disinheritance of Marxism than a reminder that Marx cannot save us, that the rational application or understanding of his theories is not now what is lacking. Rather than provide heavy handed pedagogic interpretation of Leon's understanding of the dialectic, the film, marvellously, *depicts* it—that is, allows us to see it, in the form of cue cards pinned up on Leon's wall.

The content of the cards is less the remarkable feature than the fact that Leon Bronstein has the gumption, or feels required to, detail and display his convictions if not for all to see, then, at the very least, for himself. How are we to interpret this display? One way would be to say that because everything is clear

in the mind of Leon Bronstein, it is merely a matter of convenience or formality for him to make his inner thoughts and aspirations outer, that without the cue cards Leon would be no less confident of the trajectory of his life. But another interpretation would be that the cards act as cover for the possibility that he is still capable of losing his way or his thread, so despite giving himself over to the "Grand Narrative," some type of existential dread compels him to compose reminders and to detail checkpoints. Do these cards act as a symbol of his faith or his lack of faith? Are we to believe, as Leon *seems* to, that his fate is hermetically sealed?—or is there room, indeed, for improvisation (even *too much* improvisation)? There is certainly ample evidence that Leon feels the dialectic of his life could go awry, most notably the two dream sequences—the first in which he is cut loose by his mother and father; the second, by his ostensible surrogates, Frank McGovern (his mentor/attorney) and Alexandra, his desired object of affection. That Leon appears unchanged, as a baby, in both, suggests that he feels no less vulnerable with his new found family than his old one. The fear is of betrayal certainly; but more specifically what Leon fears is that he has not the will nor ability nor voice to transform his new found family—that they will, instead, regress to (re)occupy tired moralistic roles and positions of a time gone by. In such a case, having failed in his mission to convert them, Leon will most definitely feel cut loose, as though he is the weak link in the chain of events that is *supposed* to happen (which then, of course, doesn't—all thanks to him). These dream sequences remind us that Leon is a free individual.

Yet this stance of simultaneous belief and non-belief is one source of critical distaste with the dialectic because being certain of the ends but wary of the means ought to put the ends in question to begin with. The dogmatic refusal to do so is what critics of the dialectic find frustrating.¹⁵ This is what Alexandra feels when she levels her brutal charge against Leon, that he feels things because he thinks he's supposed to. But it is also true that Leon manages to seduce her by feeling precisely the way he does and certainly not by manipulating Alexandra, but by being about as open and honest about his intentions as anyone possibly could be. Alexandra is not worried that she is being taken for a ride, but that Leon is taking himself for a ride, playing out a fantasy in which she happens to be entwined. But to claim one's desire is necessarily to act out a sort of fantasy, and a union of souls is a union of fantasies, hence a discovery of fantasies—an other's and one's own. How or what mediates these fantasies is always difficult to know beforehand. It would be far more sinister if Leon held his beliefs close to his chest, or was simply unaware of them, instead playing out the game of seduction in more conventional fashion *without* first being honest with himself. But this arguably describes the dialectic of most romantic pursuits. What is exceptional about Leon is that he has already discovered his fantasy; he is begging Alexandra to consider what hers is and whether it is compatible with his. What he offers her is the power to choose (too directly some might say), and in the end, in this case anyhow, it works—not only for Leon and Alexandra, but for us.

So what (exactly) is our source of attraction to the Trotsky? Is it because he has all the answers? Hardly. Even Leon has the temerity to doubt his own conclusions. The most immediate reason to me is because he dares to infuse the otherwise rational functioning of the dialectic with romance, which may make him less authoritative in some people's eyes, but more human in our eyes. That is, he demands that the dialectic act first and

foremost in accordance with, or in response to, his feeling and intuition. This infusion of romance is key to this film's interpretation of the dialectic, particularly in light of the following commentary on Hegel by Professor Dart:

Hegel highlighted that the Enlightenment tradition was superior to the Classical tradition, but the Enlightenment had a tendency to fragment in three directions. There was the rationalist wing of the Enlightenment that turned to science, reason and the empirical way as the yellow brick road into the future. There were the romantics that dared to differ with the rationalists, and the romantics held high the way of poetry, the arts and intuition. Then, there were the humanists. It was the humanists that attempted to see the best in the romantics and rationalists yet question their limited approaches to knowing and being. It was the humanists within the Enlightenment that attempted to synthesize the best of the rationalist and romantic traditions and raise both to a higher level through such a synthesis.¹⁶

This bit of prose captures nicely the interpretive tripartite I have been setting up, if we take Leon as stand-in for the "romantic"; Berkhoff, the old-style politician, as stand-in for the "rationalist" in pursuit of pragmatic, though unimaginative, solutions; and the NYL as stand-in for what Dart/Hegel here calls the "humanist." And because we noted earlier that the film manages to squeeze out the liberal consensus-maker, it seems that the film has abandoned some measure of its possible humanity, or what Dart/Hegel take the humanist function to be—precisely the negation or subduing of conflict in the name of *facilitating* the unfolding of the dialectic, i.e., by letting forces clash (thesis vs. antithesis) and finding a third way (synthesis).¹⁷ Yet the obvious contradiction here—between allowing a clash to happen (i.e., conflict) versus negating conflict altogether—means the third way liberal humanist must choose the manner in which the unfolding must take place, must choose more conflict or less. But for a liberal consensus-maker armed only with a *rational* understanding of how the dialectic *functions*, it becomes easy to see, right off the bat, where the asymmetry lies. How to articulate, or make the case for (say, in non-rationalist manner) *the romantic aspect of the dialectic*? Romantic conviction can only be performed, the way Leon performs his conviction. Just because of this, conviction is beyond the pale to the rational consensus-maker. Any attempt at consensus-making (however humanistic in spirit) that acts as a denial not of romance per se, but of conflict, is a denial of the very dialectic championed by the liberal humanist. This sort of contradiction is what makes *consensus politics* so specious.

As mentioned earlier, Leon Bronstein is something like what an NYL is supposed to be, this because he is armed only with his convictions, has not surrendered to the dialectic but claims it as his own, as something that provides him with his particular voice. He isn't taking charge of history in the sense that he is interpreting it. He is allowing another more significant reality to work its way through him and so is participating in that reality, not by virtue of rational weighing of costs and benefits, but through sheer belief, the stuff that stirs passions. The NYL is obviously supposed to do this, but under the auspices of technocratic wisdom. Leon Bronstein has abandoned the techno-

cratic, rationalistic portion of the dialectic and made the romantic side his *raison d'être*.

In concluding, I'll begin with some words from Jacob Klapwijk's careful survey of the dialectic in the twentieth century, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first published in Dutch in 1976 but only recently appearing in English (2010).¹⁸ Klapwijk unapologetically defines the "dialectic as an expression of belief"¹⁹ and notes how Horkheimer and Adorno "claim that 'freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking'"²⁰ without recourse to "rational justification"²¹—that is, as an axiomatic starting point. Klapwijk deals intimately with the internal contradictions of the rationalist approach—whereby a rational understanding of the historical process of unfolding is supposed to liberate us, but instead, traps us, because a world left to its own rational process of unfolding leaves little room for its subjective interpretation. He elaborates further:

We have seen that the word 'dialectics' has many [often contradictory] meanings. There is no reason to reject the notion of dialectic in itself. But we are forced to conclude that within the Hegelian and Marxist traditions the word has grown into a hidden faith regarding the inevitable course of history. History is characterized as developing via oppositions ... necessarily leading to an ominous reversal of [the promise of] reason.

Some readers may perhaps feel that this is the point at which to break off the discussion with these "dogmatic Marxists." But, for one thing, there is the question of whether a philosophical discussion ought to ever reach that point. And, apart from that, we should ask whether the desire to cut the discussion off does not equally betray a dogmatic prejudice, a belief in the so-called self-sufficiency of reason and in the closed logical nature of scientific debate ...

Thus theoretical reason pretends to be a force all its own, and faith in the dialectic becomes a self-evident dogma, although it is ignored. And in fact, strange though it may sound, this hidden dogma begins to show mythical traits ... For if myth, in the original sense of the word, is a belief in the mysterious forces of nature that are imbued with an immanent spirit, where does that leave the modern belief in the hidden advance towards an automated world driven along by "the immanent logic of history"?²²

It is more than coincidence that Taylor labels the cult of Trudeaumania "mythic."²³ Considered against the above, the belief in liberal consensus-politics betrays a mythic devotion to technocratic wisdom—taken in positive light, perhaps, by those outside of Marxist circles, and in a negative light by those within them. Both deny the role of faith in their respective accounts of the dialectic however. The only "third way" that remains is a return to belief. Indeed, Klapwijk says the Frankfurt school philosophers are not to be reproached for beginning with "an expression of belief" but for failing to adequately acknowledge this pre-theoretical starting point.²⁴ It is not "belief" that now threatens a turn to myth and dogma, but "hidden" belief—not in the dialectic per se, but in its apriori rational unfolding. "Every human being," Klapwijk says, "is obliged to face a

choice—one that impinges prior to any philosophical reflection—namely the unavoidable need to choose between what I would like to call a mythical faith and a personal faith."²⁵ The mythical faith is the blind adherence to the rational unfolding of history, whether Marxist or liberal-technocratic. A personal faith requires a belief that the betterment of human beings is possible through the dialectic, even if the means of achieving this are beyond rational calculation or articulation. Klapwijk notes also that "there is reason to be fearful," but "also reason to be confident."²⁶

What *The Trotsky* shows is that Canada is not a nation (like America) to be discovered, but a nation to be claimed—not by looking to a shared past to find clues to guarantee our survival, but by pursuing common goals and interests in the present, hence to share in an imagined future together. This is also the philosophical undercurrent of Taylor's *The Pattern of Politics*, which expresses this internal dialectical tension of Canada:

The mere belated acceptance of difference is not enough to provide the real basis of unity in this country. It will remove some of the sources of friction, but it will not create a strong sense of common fate and common belonging—in other words, an identity that will also unite Canadians. Divided as we are by language, culture, tradition, provenance, and history, we can only be brought together by common purposes; our unity must be a projective one, based on a significant common future rather than a shared past...

The seeming paradox of our situation is that really meaningful unity can only be attained by another kind of division. But this is no real paradox. People of different regions, backgrounds, languages, and cultures can only come together around some common project; and if this is meaningful, and not some magic consensus-dream in which everyone can project what he wants, then it is bound to inconvenience somebody and thus raise opposition. The great transcontinental railroads were, in their day, great bones of contention.²⁷

If it is our lot as Canadians to express ourselves in common purpose, what we require is a common voice and the political apparatus to achieve this. Furthermore, we require the faith and courage necessary to withstand not only the myriad number of clashes and confrontations, but the subsequent burden of choice, which means we will, sometimes, choose incorrectly. But we cannot waver in our belief—a belief, say, in the legitimacy of competing claims to truth, in the politics of polarization. Claiming the institutions which promote such polarization as our own, and accepting the possible fallibility of choice, is one sort of claim to community, the sort of claim invoked in *The Trotsky*.²⁸

Some will say that this film is too light to command the sort of seriousness I am demanding of it here. But it is precisely the lightness of the film that makes its message effective. That is, there is no redeeming the more humane qualities of the dialectic through seriousness, lest the author or auteur in question be labelled an ideological firebrand by (liberal) intellectuals. One way to cut through the sort of cynical critical hit-jobs in making a case (once again) for the value of the dialectic, to make a

claim for seriousness, is precisely by denying a claim to seriousness, by appealing, say, to the whims and imagination of youth. Should we be taking a film like *The Trotsky* seriously? The film has its convictions to be sure; part of what makes the film appealing is its ability to state them. How else (nowadays) to issue the sort of clarion call left-leaning critics have been issuing as early as the 1940s (Horkheimer and Adorno) or, in Canada, the 1970s (Charles Taylor)? Comedy might be one way. Seriousness is no longer given; it too has to be claimed. Part of what this film demands is participation—a claim to community. A film like *The Trotsky* is only as serious as we are willing to make it. *The Trotsky* is as likely to fall by the wayside as it is to spark a revolution. If it has (up to this point) largely fallen by the wayside, can a critical effort such as this one add anything to the film's promise?

Notes

- 1 This is the tack taken by Ronald Beiner in his critique of Taylor. Though he does not explicitly use the terms "earlier" or "later," he does make a useful distinction: "Taylor himself counts as a social critic only when he writes a book like *The Pattern of Politics*, not one like the *Sources of the Self*." While Beiner goes on to take *Sources of the Self* to task for posing as philosophical thought without engaging in the "wide justification" necessary for effective social criticism, he does not discuss whether *The Pattern of Politics* should be read as serious philosophy. See Ronald Beiner, "Hermeneutical Generosity and Social Criticism," *Critical Review* (1995): 453.
- 2 This book is also of topical significance in light of the New Democratic Party's remarkable electoral breakthrough in the most recent Canadian Federal Election (2011). The results, representative of precisely the type of polarized politics Charles Taylor was *demanding* in 1970, had mainstream liberal news magazine *Maclean's* acknowledge (though somewhat begrudgingly) this prescient text. See Charles Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics* (Montreal: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.) and John Geddes, "The Making of Jack Layton," *Maclean's*, 27 June 2011, 21.
- 3 See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971), 28.
- 4 Here are some very interesting comments by Colm Fiore on playing Trudeau: "[I did not] meet any of [Trudeau's] family before. I didn't want their truth to interfere with my fiction. There was no way I was going to be able to represent their truth in what I had to do... An actor's first thing is mimicry. We copy life. We're trying to say, 'What's the shape of that?' ... But finally, it's got to be so simple and seemingly effortless... Mitchell Sharp, God rest him, said to me at a screening, 'You don't look like him, but when I closed my eyes, I was back in that Cabinet room.' He said it was chilling. And I thought, 'We've done it. We found something true.' Note the competing 'truths,' how one interferes with the other. That is, Fiore talks about the Trudeau family's 'truth'—which we would expect to be something like the 'true' Pierre Trudeau, persona aside—and the actor's 'truth,' which is only the mimetic sort, taking outward appearance as (the only) truth. Though earlier, he says he does not want their 'truth' to interfere with his 'fiction.' See Colm Fiore, "The Star from Stratford," interview by Christopher Guly, *Reader's Digest* (August 2011), 51.
- 5 Taylor does not explicitly condemn the Western liberal tradition any more than he specifically condemns the Liberal Party of Canada. What he condemns is a "consensus view" of politics in which choice is negated in favour of a mythical free-market "hand" that allocates justice among a plethora of competing self-interests. What I take "liberal" to mean in this paper is the view or set of views that props up a stance of precisely this sort of disinterestedness, as though by merely exposing the limits of one set of interests—equally, say, over another—the case has been made that no one set of interests can or ought to supersede another—a reneging of choice. See Taylor, 3, 9–10, 102.
- 6 Ibid., 6–8.
- 7 Ibid., 6.
- 8 This is obviously an interpretation—Taylor's to be precise—for the film does not attempt to either salvage or smear the legacy of Trudeau. Canadian Hegelian David MacGregor offers a rival interpretation. Commenting on *The Pattern of Politics*, he says "Charles Taylor dismissed 'Trudeaumania' as an American copycat operation, more form than substance. Trudeau would never 'rattle the teacups' of the establishment, the philosopher claimed. Twenty years later Taylor would accept the invitation of the Business Council for National Issues to trash 'Meech rejectors' and other wayward souls while Trudeau's principled opposition to the Meech-Charlottetown garroting of Canada would upset the teacups of bankers and corporate leaders across the country." See David MacGregor, "Canada's Hegel," *Literary Review of Canada*, February 1994, accessed July 28 2011, <<http://reviewcanada.ca/essays/2001/02/01/canada-s-hegel/>>.
- 9 It would not be crazy to suppose that the trajectory of the movie should work towards "curing" Leon, so that the movie's climax would revolve around his conversion "back to reality," to a world where answers are not so easily forthcoming and where the simple pragmatism of the Berkhoffs of the world characterise the lay of the land. But this film makes a case for what Raoul Eshelman calls "performatism," for performing one's conviction—here in order to achieve not personal but political ends. Eshelman claims that the "performative" work of art claims its founding principles or narrative slant at the outset; the unfolding of the narrative work merely documents the consequences of these choices. Certainly Leon's belief provides the ontological apparatus for the internal logic of this film to unfold. See Raoul Eshelman, *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2008).
- 10 Taylor, 112.
- 11 Ibid., 113.
- 12 Here I am heartened by a segment of Cavell's reading of Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. The simultaneous comic value and horror we feel at Deeds's willingness to punch the lights out of others mirrors what we feel when Leon takes his principal hostage: "Exercising the right to speak not only takes precedence over social power, it takes precedence over any particular form of accomplishment; no amount of contribution is more valuable to the formation and preservation of community than the willingness to contribute and the occasion to be heard... it leaves your voice your own and allows your opinion to matter to others only because it matters to you. It is not a voice that will be heard by villains. This means that to discover our community a few will have to be punched out, made speechless in their effort to usurp or devalue the speech of others—one interpretation of Deeds's repeated violence, punching men in the jaw. It is a fantasy of a reasonably well ordered participatory democracy. It has its dangers; democracy has; speech has." See Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 2004), 207.
- 13 The "Grand Narrative," then, as an account, simply, of how things came to be. The idea behind studying the dialectic, of course, is that with enough patience and endurance, one can begin to uncover or unearth the "logic" of the times gone by (*geist*), hence decode how the dialectic is set to unfold in future.
- 14 Eagleton's distinction is between rigid, implacable dogma (moralism) and the sort of morality that comes via a layered and subtle engagement with "an intricately woven texture of nuances, qualities and fine gradations." See Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 144. This book is featured on Leon's shelf in the film.
- 15 A prominent critic in this vein is Karl Popper whose *Poverty of Historicism* (1957) takes dead aim at Marxists, in particular their insistence that "all history is the history of class struggle." Posed as a hypothesis, Popper notes the idea is compelling. But ultimately, as theory, the premise is untestable. Though in the book he opts for a political agenda of "piecemeal social engineering," he still advocates the "necessity of adopting a point of view" though always with a mind to its potential falsification. See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 58, 140.
- 16 See Ron Dart, "Charles Taylor and the Hegelian Eden Tree: Canadian Philosophy and Compradorism," *Vive le Canada*, May 1, 2007, accessed August 2, 2011, <<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/article/235045487-charles-taylor-and-the-hegelian-eden-tree-canadian-philosophy-and-compradorism>>.
- 17 This terminology may be a bit purple or imprecise. I use it figuratively.
- 18 See Jacob Klapwijk, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Critical Theory and the Messianic Light* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010).
- 19 Ibid., 91.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., 94–95.
- 23 Taylor, 8.
- 24 Klapwijk, 95.
- 25 Ibid., 96.
- 26 Ibid., 97.
- 27 Taylor, 131, 134.
- 28 The achievement of a political mechanism representative of a voice expresses the kernel of truth behind Leslie Armour's definition of community: "A community shows itself in the institutions it legitimizes—or tries to legitimize. The structure of a community is the shape of public authority and the pattern of men's interactions with each other." Contrast this with Cavell's "The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say are claims to community. And the claim to community is always a search for the basis upon which it can or has been established." See Leslie Armour, *The Idea of Canada* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1981), 15 and Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford, UP), 20.

Digitality and Détournement

JOHN GREYSON'S BDS VIDEOS AND 14.3 SECONDS

by SCOTT MACKENZIE

John Greyson is perhaps best known for his activist videos and feature filmmaking, but he has also produced a great deal of experimental films and videos, often using found footage. A current instance of Greyson's found footage filmmaking is his recent Youtube and Vimeo activist works such as *Killer York: CUPE 3903 Video* (2008), *G 7 vs. G8* (2010), *Hey Elton* (2010), *Vuvuzela* (2010), *BDS Bieber* (2011) and *Gaza Island* (2011), made with his frequent collaborators musician David Wall and editor Jared Raab. These agitprop digital interventions draw heavily on the Situationist theory and practice called *détournement*. One can see connections between Greyson's mode of appropriation and the one outlined by Gil J Wolman and Guy Debord in "A User's Guide to *Détournement*" in 1956:

It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that *détournement* can attain its greatest effectiveness and, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty [...]. [W]e can observe that Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* is one of the most important films in the history of the cinema because of its wealth of innovations. On the other hand, it is a racist film and therefore absolutely does not merit being shown in its present form. But its total prohibition could be seen as regrettable from the point of view of the secondary, but potentially worthier, domain of the cinema. It would be better to detourn it as a whole, without necessarily even altering the montage, by adding a soundtrack that made a powerful denunciation of the horrors of imperialist war and of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now.¹

In his recent short works, Greyson and his collaborators work in the spirit of Debord and Wolman. In essence, Greyson's use of popular music with *détourned* lyrics functions in a parallel manner to Debord and Wolman's desire to add a new soundtrack to *Birth of a Nation*. For instance, *Killer York: CUPE 3903 Video* reworks images taken from Michael Jackson's video *Thriller* (John Landis, 1983) with a new lyrics put to the music of the song, in support of striking sessional teachers and teaching assistants at York University. The musical appropriation (recasting new lyrics onto an existing melody) harkens back to Greyson's "I Hate Straights" rewrite of Brecht and Weill's "Mack the Knife" in *The Making of 'Monsters'*, but his use of *détourned* images from Jackson's video is a step further, inserting him in the company of contemporary political found footage filmmakers like Craig Baldwin, Keith Sanborn, Jerry Tartaglia and Abigail Child. His BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) videos, sup-

porting the protests against Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, use the *faux*-music video to examine the politics of artists who perform in Israel. The BDS movement itself is defined as follows: "The global movement for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights was initiated by Palestinian civil society in 2005, and is coordinated by the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), established in 2007. BDS is a strategy that allows people of conscience to play an effective role in the Palestinian struggle for justice."² Greyson's contributions to the BDS movement are perhaps best demonstrated in *Hey Elton*, which argues for the Crocodile Rocker to cancel his gigs in Israel. Greyson acknowledges that John did not play in Egypt because of the country's anti-gay stance, but that this does not grant John impunity to appear in other Middle Eastern countries that also have repressive politics. Greyson does this by *détourning* John's songs and performances with new lyrics about the occupation and juxtaposes John's performance with images from Gaza, destabilising the spectacle of performance that elides the politics on the ground, and reveals that a simple pop performance is far from apolitical.

The culmination of found footage aesthetics, genealogical history and *détournement* in Greyson's work is *14.3 Seconds* (2008), his found footage film made from shards of film left after the bombing of the Iraqi film archive in 2003. Beginning life as an installation, and then turned into a film, *14.3 Seconds* addresses the way in which archives, often understood as simple repositories of culture and cultural artifacts are, like histories themselves, determined by the winners. Greyson outlined the story of its origin:

A friend was in Baghdad a couple of months after the war. He visited a concert hall, the best in the region and home to reputedly the Arab world's finest orchestra. The building was mostly in ruins, having suffered extensive damage from American bombs. Picking his way through the rubble, he found a floor thickly carpeted with scraps of celluloid, as if the gods were emptying their trim bins and these strips had fallen like flakes of ash from the sky. In fact, this celluloid confetti was all that remained of Baghdad's acclaimed film archive, also housed in this building and likewise the finest in the region, the main repository for a century of Arab cinema. He tried to piece together scraps but could find no matching bits longer than a dozen frames.³

The video opens with images of bombs falling over Baghdad on the right side of the screen, then the following text appears beside it: "During the Iraq War, US planes bombed the National

Film Archives in Baghdad. A century of Arab cinema was reduced to melted scraps of celluloid." As the still images of destruction continue to unfold, another title appears: "Eight scraps were salvaged by a journalist, totaling 14.3 seconds in time." The short eight scraps of film then flash by on the screen. This quick series of images immediately raises a series of questions: can we know anything from these scraps? Are they a trace of what was destroyed or are they so unanchored that all they speak to is the destruction itself? Is our faith in images so wrongheaded as to lead us to believe that these eight remnants can be in any way transparent? From this moment on, the video deploys an imaginary history of what these films scraps may be and how they fit into this alternative history or Iraqi cinema. The titles then outline the supposed Iraqi Coalition Archive Restoration Project (I.C.A.R.P.), and then, one by one, each film, numbered 1 to 8, is introduced and the various plots of each film is given in *précis*. The films include *Al Qadisiya* (*The Battle of Qadisiya*, 1982), by Egyptian director Salah Abu Seif, *Ayyam al-tawila* (*The Long Days*, 1981), a six hour film based on Saddam Hussein's historical novel and *Al mas ab al-kubra* (*The Great Question*, 1983), co-starring Oliver Reed in a tale of the 1920s uprising against the British. And while all of the films described are real films, each 'restoration' is constructed from elements of the eight scraps, looped, slowed down and re-edited in a plethora of ways. And the partial, incomplete history that is provisionally rebuilt from these images is echoed in the relationship between the American soldier and his Iraqi translator, whose own undocumented, unknowable relationship is torn apart through the vagaries of war. At the end of these endlessly recombinant films, we see the original scraps again, unadulterated. Then we find out that only two of the films (*Al Qadisiya* and *Ayyam al-tawila*) have actually been identified; the sources of the other scraps are still unknown. The final title of *14.3 Seconds* states: "All six of the films referenced are actual Iraqi productions, and their titles, credits and plot descriptions are accurate." The video, then, is an examination not of lost history but how the reconstruction of history is endlessly recombinant. Its mash-up of fact and fiction, and the way it addresses the thin line in between the two is reminiscent of Orson Welles' similar rumination of the documentary, *F for Fake* (France/Iran/W. Germany, 1973).

In this, Greyson's overall project fits in with those of other artists, activist and archivists who are now re-examining not only how history is recorded through moving images, but also how the very existence or non-existence of moving images in many ways tells a story more real than any that could be shown through images alone. As fellow artist *cum* image archeologist Hito Steyerl notes:

[...] the function of the archive has become more complicated, for the most diverse reasons, ranging from digital reproduction technologies to the mere fact that some nations simply cease to exist and their archives are destroyed and collapse. Temporarily, this was the case with the Sarajevo film museum, which was heavily damaged during the war of the 90s. On the other hand, new national archives appear on the scene. In addition to the film museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo, there is now also a Bosnian-Serbian film museum in Pale. Heritages are dispersed and recollected, though in different combinations.⁴ (Steyerl 2008)

Steyerl's analysis of the death and rebirth of the Sarajevo Film

Museum is also addressed in her film essay *Journal Number 1: An Artist's Impression* (Germany, 2007), which attempts to recreate a missing film from the Sarajevo Film Museum, made two years after the end of World War II, by having an artist sketch viewers' memories of the film itself. The sketch artist himself begins to tell his own story of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and when documentary images can not be found, fictional films from Sutjeska Studio, including Emir Kusturica's first film *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?* (Yugoslavia, 1981) are used in its stead. Both *Journal Number 1: An Artist's Impression* and *14.3 Seconds* point towards the always partial and fragmentary nature of reconstruction. Steyerl goes on to note:

Not only are the archives themselves being transformed, but some of their content is being repeated differently as well. To put it more precisely: the repetition on which the archives' authority rests is being transformed. Cracks and fissures open up between the various types of control exercised by nation or capital, because nations and capital are themselves profoundly transformed by the forces of postcommunist and postcolonial situations as well as by deep neoliberalization.⁵

In the cases of *Rex v. Singh* and *14.3 Seconds*, Greyson's use of the 'parodic historical' functions as a means by which to restitute these histories into the public sphere but not as totalized, complete, non-dialogic objects. The 'parodic historical' works to foreground debates, conflict and contestation through humour and not to perpetuate simple, uncontested facts. Revealing the positivist structures of historical narratives and thereby throwing into question their ability to empirically define and delineate the world is not an argument against history, the archive or archeology—just the opposite in fact: it is an argument for the kind of genealogical history Foucault postulates as central to reclaiming what is left outside positivist history and the search for origins. While Greyson is claiming that a holistic model of understanding this fragmented past, and the discourses of racism and homophobia that run through it, can not be totalized in a Rankéan model of history, the fragments themselves—retrieved, re-articulated and re-imagined, are how counter-histories of our received notions of the past aid and abet our own re-imagining of the present: how we understand ourselves, how 'we' understand the past, and how we figure out what we mean by 'we'. From his first works, Greyson's films and videos have been about the possibility of a coalitional politics that emerges from how one dialectically juxtaposes historically rooted moments of the past to re-articulate the future. This self-reflexive use of humour as an analytic tool to find historical traces points not only to his audacity and originality, but also to his political commitment to find discursive strategies that bridge the present and past to revivify the past and throw our preconceived notions of the present into question.

Notes

- 1 Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement," in Ken Knabb, ed. *Situationist International Anthology*. rev. ed. (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 19.
- 2 "Homepage: What is BDS?," www.bdsmovement.net/. Accessed Dec. 23, 2011.
- 3 John Greyson, "Waiting for the Sky to Fall," in *Surface Tension: Essays on Video* (Toronto: Vtape, 2005): 24..
- 4 Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film," *Transversal* 06 2008. eipcp.net/transversal/06087/steyerl/en. Accessed Dec. 23, 2011.
- 5 Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film," *Transversal* 06 2008. eipcp.net/transversal/06087/steyerl/en. Accessed Dec. 23, 2011.

The Exorcist

STUDIES IN THE HORROR FILM

DANEL OLSON
Centipede Press, 2011

Reviewed by DAVID COWEN

Danel Olson's collection of essays and interviews in his new anthology *The Exorcist: Studies in the Horror Film*, makes a compelling case as to why this movie stands out as an icon of filmmaking, both in the horror genre and films in general. The book contains 25 essays and interviews, 8 of which were previously unpublished. Olson is editor of Ash Tree's and now PS Publishing's acclaimed *Exotic Gothic* series.

The commercial success of *The Exorcist* (not the sequels and prequels) cannot be disputed. The movie opened the day after Christmas in 1973. Adjusted for inflation, BoxOffice Mojo.com ranks *The Exorcist* ninth in total worldwide ticket sales of all movies ever released. The movie also garnered Oscars for Best Screenplay (William Blatty) and Best Sound (Robert Knudson and Christopher Newman). As the interview with William Peter Blatty early in Olson's collection reveals, the budget for the film was \$12 million—now a paltry sum, but huge for its day. Financially, the movie was a commercial blockbuster.

From a social standpoint, the movie stabbed into the heart of American fears and possessed its psyche. What human being in America has not shivered at the iconic image of Max Von Sydow, satchel in hand, a forlorn shadow walking into the bright beams emanating from Regan MacNeil's window? Western Christians like to envision light as a harbinger of good; the fingers of God reaching down to comfort us from the clouds. This light, blinding and stark, immerses Sydow's character Father Merrin in abject darkness. There is no guiding hand in the brilliant rays from Regan's room. It is clearly a path towards doom and despair.

Olson's new collection attempts to capture the essence of this film and its impact. The book is divided by movie—*The Exorcist*, *The Heretic*, the "Director's Cut" re-release of *The Exorcist* from 2000, *Exorcist III* and the two prequels. Blatty was involved with two of these later productions and the re-release, calling the others humiliating and embarrassing.

Olson provides an analysis of this film on several levels. First, through a series of interviews with Blatty, Friedkin and actors and editors, many of which were written shortly after the movie was released, Olson provides an inside view of how this movie came to be; the craft and inspiration that brought it to the big screen. In other essays, Olson presents the cultural and social impact of the movie and the varied meanings given to it.

Olson's well written forward includes a very personal recollection of seeing the movie for the first time while in the midst of losing a beloved uncle. Olson saw the ending of the

film a source of hope and revealing the power of sacrifice. Blatty, as the interviews and essays reveal, shared Olson's view of *The Exorcist* as having a positive ending.

In the essays presented by Olson, Blatty argues that Karras' sacrifice is a victory, though, as the various essays discuss, many who saw the film viewed it otherwise. The movie depicted a direct two-way confrontation between Satan (in the form of his minion, the pre-Christian god Pazuzu) and man. Though God's name is invoked, both profanely and in ritual, there is no hint in the movie that God ever directly entered into the confrontation. The two priests, both human to a fault in their own way, perish, removing Pazuzu from Regan only after becoming sacrifices themselves. It was this sense that evil could not be defeated, only placated, that helped to create the public's reaction to the movie. Oddly, despite this impact, as the interviews in Olson's collection reveal, the makers of *The Exorcist* did not expect the public to be so affected.

The interviews of Blatty and Friedkin reveal large egos who posit no doubts in their self-belief as craftsmen. Blatty states in one interview that he never had any doubts that the book and movie would be a success. It seemed destined to be so. He won approval from a publisher by describing his book to him at a cocktail party. The book was a huge success. Using this power, Blatty demanded that Warner Brothers Studios allow him to produce the movie and use his friend William Friedkin to direct. In hindsight, the combination seems made of genius, but we discover that Blatty's prior work was as a script writer for silly comedies such as Blake Edward's Inspector Clouseau movie, *A Shot in the Dark*.

The Friedkin of 1974 is young and brash, stating that his first interaction with Blatty was to tell him how he disliked an earlier script written by Blatty. It was the beginning of a decades' long friendship.

In 1973, Friedkin denies that *The Exorcist* is even about demonic possession or a horror tale. Maybe Regan had a disease and all of the shaking and ghostly occurrences were just some type of insanity on the part of the priests he suggests. He discounts stories in the press about people fainting and becoming hysterical saying that people know movies aren't real. Blatty, however, adamantly insists that the book and movie are about demonic possession. By 2010, Friedkin seems to acknowledge Blatty's position by point blank asking him if he truly believes in demonic possession. Blatty, a product of Jesuit schools, emphatically says yes; though the occurrences, in his opinion, are rare.

In 1973, both Blatty and Friedkin deny any latent symbolism in the movie beyond the story. To Blatty it is a simple movie about possession. Friedkin claims that he just wasn't smart enough to know how to be symbolic. In later pieces, either interviews or those written by Blatty, they both seem to acknowledge that *The Exorcist* may have much deeper meanings than a simple story.

The other interviews, which include Jason Miller who played Father Karras for which he was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in 1974, and makeup artist Dick Smith and film editor Bud Smith, round out the study of the film as a craft. Miller, interviewed in 1974, is an articulate and intelligent actor and Pulitzer-winning writer who reveals his development of the layers of his portrayal of the self-tortured priest in the film. Miller explains, following the same theme that Friedkin suggested, that the film was "compassionate"

even seeming to agree that the entire affair might have been in Karras' head. Dick Smith, also from 1974 at the height of the movie's success, details the technical aspects of makeup and special effects before the advent of computer graphic imagery. The hardest part of his job he reveals was devising a frontal view of Regan vomiting the now famous thick green pea soup. The undated interview with Bud Smith appears to have been much later. Bud Smith, who did not read Blatty's book before he worked on the film, recounts his work with Friedkin in the movie as well as later projects in salty sailoresque language. When asked if he considered Friedkin to be a "psychopath" Smith declines to answer directly instead acknowledging Friedkin's difficult and demanding nature.

The Blatty and Friedkin interviews continue to conclude with a 2010 interview of Blatty by Friedkin. Old friends remembering old times and hoping for new, hinting they would like to work together again and bring Blatty's recent thriller *Dimiter* to the big screen. It becomes apparent that over all these years, despite many disagreements between the two over the final cut of *The Exorcist* and even its meaning, they remained steadfast friends.

Olson crafts these series of interviews between articles about the potential symbolism of the movie, its social impact, two articles comparing *The Exorcist* with other ground breaking gothic films—*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Don't Look Now*—as well as essays analyzing Blatty's works as serious literature. A fascinating twist to the symbolism is in Barbara Creed's 1993 essay *Woman As Possessed Monster: The Exorcist*. Creed explores a feminist analysis of the movie's depiction of the female as demon and victim. Contrary to Friedkin's assertions in 1974 that the film lacked any real religious overtones, Creed proclaims that film's central conflict was between "Christ and the Devil." Creed explores the theme that the film addresses subtle undertones of an incestual bond between Regan and her mother Chris MacNeil which Creed believes opened the door to the possession of Regan. Creed concludes with the proposition that the shock of Regan's portrayal is from her breaking with her "proper feminine role." Regan changes from the stereotypical virginal girl-next-door to the foul mouthed monster. Regan's possession is, then, an analogy for the rise of the modern female as seen through the eyes of men evolving from weak, suppliant girls into independent and monstrous women.

Olson rounds out these studies with Mark Opsasnick's *The Haunted Boy: The Inspiration for The Exorcist*, a fascinating account of the discovery of the 1949 exorcism incident that inspired Blatty to write the book. Was it real? Did a demon really possess a young man? All the participants insist the story was true. Blatty clearly believes this as well.

The more problematic studies in the book focus on *The Exorcist* franchise: the multiple and habitually unsuccessful sequels, prequels and even the "Director's Cut" of the original film (which did make money as a re-release). So why study these obvious disappointments? These essays as well as several dealing with the two sequels and prequels present an interesting query. Do these other movies, which by almost any standards were abject financial failures, represent crass commercialism attempting to capitalize on a sure thing, or are they indicative of an artist searching to find and rekindle that spark of genius that overcame him as he sequestered himself in a small cabin in the woods so many years before to create his iconic work? Olson's treatment of these later works, one of the

screenplays for which was written by Blatty, present a case study of the paradox of financial success and the craft of genius and creation.

Blatty was not involved with and essentially disavowed the first sequel *Exorcist: The Heretic*. Blatty found *Heretic* embarrassing. The studio, he felt, just wanted to exploit the film's history. After publishing *Legion*, his gothic and psychological crime drama sequel to his novel *The Exorcist*, he produced and directed *Exorcist III*. The studio would not allow him to use the new novel's name in the title, hoping instead, to draw in audiences with references to the original film. Despite a rousing depiction of old ladies crawling on ceilings and dropping on their victims, the movie was not a commercial success. Blatty had seriously wanted to create a quality sequel in *Exorcist III* and forever blamed Morgan Creek, the production studio, for ruining his film on the editing table.

We learn from these various pieces that Blatty was also never satisfied with the original film's presentation of his work. He felt that critical pieces of the film were cut by Friedkin. Friedkin on the other hand makes clear that he didn't care much for Blatty's ideas on how to make the film. In 2000, after 16 years of complaining, the studio allowed Blatty to release his "director's cut" which many critics called a "producer's cut." Included in the new version of the film is the infamous and long whispered "spider walk" by Regan which had been filmed but not used because the cables supporting Linda Blair for the scene were too visible. Only after more modern film editing techniques could Blatty have the cables edited out so the scene could be used. Michael A. Arnzen's essay on this release discusses the negative reception to Blatty's attempt to "fix" the original. Arnzen notes that one critic, Roger Ebert, called the addition of the previously deleted scenes, as well as the addition of computer images of Pazuzu's face and Karras' mother's face in windows, doors and stove tops as pointless and catastrophic. Blatty's attempt at perfecting the already perfect failed.

Later, a final sequel was attempted, focusing on Father Merrin's past battle with the demon Pazuzu. The end result of a \$41 million budget was two versions of the same movie. James Kloda's newly published essay, "In The Beginning There was *Dominion*: A Duel for the Soul of *The Exorcist* Prequel," provides a detailed account of this schizophrenic production and the clash between artist and the commercialism that caused it.

The first prequel, *Exorcist: The Beginning*, had originally been directed by Paul Shrader, who was fired by the studio and replaced with Renny Harlin. This version failed to break even. Erik Myers' interview with Shrader reveals that he and Blatty went to see the "replacement" version of the film directed by Harlin. Shrader laughed openly and Blatty brooded in horror. The original footage shot by Shrader was not used for this production.

Morgan Creek allowed Shrader to later edit his unused footage and *Dominion: Prequel To The Exorcist* was released. Blatty was pleased with this work but it was never given a chance for a full release. It is currently available on Netflix and is a solid work. Unfortunately for Blatty, the franchise had been exorcised from the public domain.

For both students of film and of horror, Olson's collection brings a complete picture of the history, psychology and impact of this iconic work and Blatty's later efforts to reproduce it. It is a "must have" collection for any serious student of film or horror.

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

2011

The Deep Blue Sea

A TALE TOLD BY TWO TERENCEs

by SUSAN MORRISON

FIRST COMMENTER: Nothing actually happens in the trailer. I didn't even finish watching the two minutes.

SECOND COMMENTER: Well, someone falls in love, and then that relationship seems to fall apart. Perhaps that's "nothing" for you. If so, then I don't think the film's really meant for you. It's not a children's film.

—From a discussion on the IMDB message board for *The Deep Blue Sea*, Wednesday, September 28, 2011

Terence Davies, the British filmmaker whose last film at TIFF in 2008 was *Of Time and the City*, a documentary homage to his hometown Liverpool, this year brought something quite different. *The Deep Blue Sea* (2011) is a very personal reworking of British playwright Terence Rattigan's very personal "The Deep Blue Sea" from 1952. With only three main actors and several peripheral ones, Davies' is an unusually 'small' film; small in scope; small in narrative territory covered; small in costs (2.5 million according to the director). However and nevertheless, it packs an unusually large emotional visual and dramatic wallop.

Davies has kept Rattigan's central narrative focusing on a single fateful day in the intertwined lives of three people: middle-aged Hester Collyer/Rachel Weisz, her younger lover Freddie Page/Tom Hiddleston, a WWII RAF pilot

and hero now out of work, and her older husband Sir William Collyer/Simon Russell Beale, an esteemed judge, whom she abandoned for Freddie 10 months earlier. The focus is on Hester: she is the first character we see, closing the curtains of a window in the flat where they live, and she is the last person we see, opening those same curtains. In between these structurally symmetrical and narratively symbolic bookended gestures, the trajectory of the plot leads her from the hell of abject desperation and attempted suicide to an acceptance, albeit reluctant, of the reality of her situation, with its implied emancipation from her obsessive reliance on and need for the romantic love that has had her in thrall.

While both play and film maintain the structure of a morning-to-evening timeframe, Davies uses the filmic medium to brilliantly accomplish two kinds of expansions. First, he moves the narrative outside of the play's (intentionally) claustrophobic mise-en-scène of a single stage set which depicts the rather dreary flat where Hester and Freddie have

been living. Events that had occurred off-stage in the play are now depicted *in situ* in the film version. Second, he has inserted flashbacks that fill in some of the back-story details for the central triangulated love relationship. While the play unfolded in a linear fashion, taking place strictly across a single day, the film interjects scenes and sequences in a non-linear manner, depicting past events that serve to give explanatory meaning to Hester's actions in the present. Davies has chosen to use these to amplify our knowledge and understanding of Hester's actions, rather than relying on great swaths of expository (and sometimes moralizing) dialogue, as in the play, especially its first and last acts.

While one could reasonably expect that such additions would flatten out and 'dumb down' the film for a contemporary audience, in fact it's quite the opposite. The decisions made by Davies when translating the play into film serve to bring a level of complexity to

the narrative beyond the limits of a theatrical production, and render *The Deep Blue Sea* a true filmic experience rather than merely a 'filmed play'.

One of the most strongly defining features of the film, absent of course in the play, is Davies' remarkable use of music which serves as an adjunct to the intense visual and dramatic narrative unfolding on screen. Particularly powerful is the director's choice of Samuel Barber's "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra op. 14", its plaintive strains poignantly repeated throughout the film as a kind of leitmotif for Hester's deeply passionate, hopelessly romantic, inevitably tragic attachment to Freddie. Davies has stated that he had always loved Barber's concerto, and what's more, Hiddleston noted in an interview that the music was actually written right into the script. But the piece does not just happen to be sympathetic to the narrative; historical accuracy is maintained in that the concerto, written in 1947, is from the same time period as both play (1952) and storyline (1950). In addition to this piece which is so much more than background music, there are two moments in *The Deep Blue Sea* where Davies uses the rendition of complete songs to 'stop' the narrative action in a kind of 'aside' in order to deepen the film's affect. Both instances involve music as part of the diegesis itself. The first occurs during a flashback sequence that alludes to the growing

involvement between Hester and Freddie at the beginning of their relationship. The scene consists of a single long take with a stationary camera; its subject, Freddie and Hester, centre-framed, dance to a recording of Jo Stafford's version of 'You Belong to Me'. As the song plays out in its entirety, the couple revolve slowly and rhythmically, isolated in the frame as in the film; all that matters at that moment evoked by the slightest of hand-on-hand gestures, lingering smiles, locked-in gazes, and bodies pressed ever so gently up against each other. Nothing more is needed to convey just what's happening; an economy of means to produce a wealth of effects.

A second example of the compelling way in which Davies interpellates a song into the narrative occurs in an unusual scene that is a complete flashback in itself. The camera tracks slowly left from one end of the platform of an Underground station to the other, in (what I recall as) another long take. As it moves laterally, it reveals to us groups of people huddling together on the platform for shelter and comfort as a single clear female voice begins to sing the old popular song 'Molly Malone'. It quickly becomes apparent that this scene is a flashback, taking place during the recent war some 5 years earlier, and that these are a cross-section of Londoners seeking refuge from the German bombing raids up above ground. As the camera continues to track left, more voices join in the singing, until the entire mass of refugees are singing in unison. The camera comes to rest on a couple standing beside each other, soon revealed to us as Hester and William, also singing 'Molly Malone'. Their appearance in the shot is almost like a punchline in a joke: it comes at the end, thereby revealing to us the reason for the shot's inclusion in the film. What's unique about this scene is that it doesn't actually drive the narrative, as nothing happens in terms of action; rather, it serves to complement it. In this succinct way, Davies pulls together a number of ideas about common cause and the power of a simple song to draw people together in moments of terror and suffering. But he has also fixed Hester and William in a historical context—WWII air raid shelter—and 'normalized' their relationship to the extent that they are depicted as part of the larger humanity.

Davies' film, as Rattigan's play, touch-

es on issues of class: Hester grates against the restrictions and repressions of William's social class, especially noted in a scene Davies inserted into the film where Hester takes tea with William and his mother, who offers advice to her daughter-in-law along with disapproval. And Freddie, a WWII hero complete with medals for distinguished service, is lost in the cultural world inhabited by Hester (another scene inserted by Davies occurs in an art gallery where Freddie explodes after Hester alludes to his lack of knowledge about the paintings), as he's lost in the real world of post war England, jobless and with few prospects. But the film (and play) is less concerned with social issues than with the 'complexity of love', as Tom Hiddleston put it in an interview. What is noteworthy in the film is that there are neither heroes or villains amongst the three protagonists. All three are eminently likeable yet flawed in their own way. It's Hester's tragedy that she's caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: on the one side, there's Freddie, for whom she has given up everything: husband, social position, security, reputation, yet who is not emotionally capable of returning her all-consuming passion. And on the other, there's William, a decent man who is willing to forgive her and take her back, but whom she knows is also not capable of loving her the way she requires.

Set 'around 1950', *The Deep Blue Sea* places us back into an England recovering from the ravages and fresh memories of the Second World War. While for the theatre audience of 1952 the play's context was contemporary, for a 2011 filmgoer a historical leap of some 60 years is required to bridge the distance between diegetic characters and present viewers. Added to the prerequisite of an historical consciousness is the melodramatic nature of the storyline. While *The Deep Blue Sea* is a melodrama in both its original sense of a drama heightened by music as well as the more recent critical concept of a woman's genre, it's the latter characteristic that could be problematic for a contemporary audience. Like the best of the classic 'women's films' of the forties and early fifties, this film requires you to identify with the female protagonist Hester, who is its emotional centre. As with the generic conventions of the woman's film, this film's concerns are for the ultimate happiness of the female protagonist, a happiness which

conventionally relied on the perfect love relationship and the typical happy ending. But in *The Deep Blue Sea*, the 'happy ending' becomes more of a bittersweet one as it comes at the expense of the perfect relationship, with Hester's acceptance that neither Freddie nor William can fulfill her emotional needs. While it's Freddie who abandons Hester in the end, the implication is that she knows that she's better off on her own, without either of the two men in her life. She is alone, but not defeated.

The Deep Blue Sea is a deeply old-fashioned film, and I mean that in the best possible sense. Its slowness of pace, idiosyncratic camerawork (including static shots often held for longer than is customary in filmmaking today), use of sweetly romantic music, darkened interiors and plot that focuses on a woman's point of view all harken back to a bygone era of filmmaking. Mood and feeling are inferred and implied rather than explicitly stated and revealed. This is especially true of Davies' handling of the single 'sex scene' in *The Deep Blue Sea*. In contrast to most 'romantic' films today, the sex scene is remarkably understated. While it does consist of the more or less conventional shot of the two lovers on a bed fully nude, bodies and limbs entwined in each other's embrace, the camerawork is quite unusual. Held just above and hovering over the two bodies in such a way as to present only parts of the bodies rather than a full and complete view, the camera moves across and around them in a gentle and rhythmic way, emphasizing not raw passion and steamy sex, but rather the utter tenderness of the moment. This is Hester's desire made visible: deep and total intimacy with a man. It is her fate that Freddie can't provide it outside of sex, and William can't provide it at all.

And it precisely here in this old-fashioned narrative, where Rachel Weisz as Hester really holds her own. She brings exactly the right amount of dignity to a role that could have been easily reduced to caricature in less capable hands. In fact, a reading of Rattigan's play makes apparent the potential for playing Hester as a spoiled and selfish woman who just won't get over her issues. Davies' mise-en-scène with its quiet restraint and Weisz's superb interpretation of Hester as a most sympathetic figure have produced a film of unusual delicacy and remarkable staying power.

A Celebration of a Simple Life

by ALICE SHIH

If I pitch you a story about a working man juggling his time to provide for his family, you would not question much about the storyline; but if I told you that this busy man put his life on hold to take care of his elderly sick servant, you would probably think that this is a joke. Like Pedro Almodovar, who turns the totally unthinkable fiction of *The Skin I Lived In* into a wonderful cinematic experience, veteran Hong Kong director Ann Hui rediscovers humanity in this extraordinary true story of writer Roger Lee and his servant, Tao, in *A Simple Life*, showcased at the Toronto International Film Festival 2011.

Ann Hui is a veteran filmmaker whose directorial career kick-started the Hong Kong New Wave movement in 1979 with her debut feature, *The Secret*,

starring Sylvia Chang. Since then, she has made close to thirty films covering various subjects and genres, from martial arts to social commentaries. Her films have garnered numerous international awards and her latest work, *A Simple Life*, was in competition at the Venice Film Festival where the leading lady, Deanie Ip, who played Tao, won the best actress award.

Hui worked in TV, shooting social dramas as well as documentaries, before she moved on to the big screen. Her vision on the social issues that she was depicting on screen has always been critical, analytic but non-intrusive. This objective style carries over to her narrative features as she continues to observe her subjects at a comfortable distance, just close enough to decipher the situa-





tion without being invasive as the narrative unfolds.

The camera in *A Simple Life* documents the daily living of our protagonist, Tao, an orphan who, since she was a teenager, has worked as a domestic helper for the same family for four generations. Roger (played by Hong Kong heartthrob Andy Lau), is the only member of the family who is still in Hong Kong; the rest of the family members have emigrated abroad. The two have developed a special bond, more like god-mother/god-son, than a master-servant relationship. Even though Tao does all the chores around the apartment, Roger never orders her around. When he requests her to cook a dish that she considers unhealthy for his heart condition, she refuses and expresses her concern like a mother, and Roger, unlike a master, is not enraged. She eventually gives in, just like a soft-hearted mom. This transcendent bond from a master-servant to a mother-child relationship was credible in 1960s Hong Kong society when live-in maids who served their masters' household loyally were treated as a member of the family. Big families

with lots of kids were considered by the Chinese to be a prosperous sign at the time, but the exhausted mothers could never keep up without maids. These maids never married, gave up the chance of raising their own families, and adopted their masters' families. They cared for and brought up their masters' kids like their own. In return, respectable masters would ensure these maids could retire with dignity when they could no longer serve. The whole relationship was entirely built upon trust, respect and love. If they didn't get along, either party could choose to end the employment at any time; the master would then look for another helper while the maid would look for another family. Times have changed; maid service in Hong Kong has moved from an unwritten long term contract to a written document with an expiry date. Migrant caregivers have taken over the job and they only see themselves as baby-sitters. They will leave their masters' household once their contract expires in a few years, and fly back to their country of origin and their own families. Most of them do love and care for the kids in

the house but not in the same way as Tao loved Roger. Gone are the days when a maid like Tao could see her baby master grow from new born to adulthood and mature into middle or old age, one generation after another.

This Asian domestic helper practice was somewhat similar but different from what was depicted in the hit movie *The Help*. Like in *The Help*, kids were brought up by their maids but there was no racial tension in a homogenous Chinese society. Unlike the servants in the American deep south who were mothers themselves and would go back home at the end of their shift, Chinese maids like Tao lived with their masters' families 24/7, and would have to arrange with their masters if they needed to take any time off, which usually meant an unusual occasion, like a birth or death in their own families. Of course, not all masters were respectable and exploitation of these maids like in *The Help* did occur, but the true story of Roger and Tao proves to the world that honourable traditions from the past sometimes remain and traces of old values still ignite the stone-cold hearts of people nowadays.

Roger Lee wrote the screenplay and took it to Hui as he has always been a fan of Hui's observatory filmmaking style. Hui is able to depict this rather incredible relationship through the sentiments of the two characters, and not by didactic or expository dialogue, which are techniques frequently employed by melodramas. Tao is depicted as independent, diligent and a selfless provider, nurturing Roger in her best possible way. She is contented, never asks for anything extra and is uncomfortable with the gifts presented to her. Roger's chaotic work in the film industry involves a lot of traveling and that challenges his nutrition as well as his weak heart. He is pampered when he comes home to Tao for her home-cooking as well as her company. When Tao takes ill and Roger becomes the caregiver, Tao is very uncomfortable with this role-reversal. With her newly acquired disability stripping away her identity as a caregiver, she has a hard time coming to terms with herself and accepting help from others, especially Roger, whom she sees as needing to be taken care of and not to be burdened by her. When Roger suggests that he will bring her home and hire another maid to take care of them together, she says she feels more comfortable going to a nursing home instead. It might have been her love for Roger speaking, not wanting to bother him at home, or her pride has gotten a hold of her as she chooses to deal with her illness away from the one she loves dearly. The verbal exchanges between Tao and Roger are always restrained, respectful and playful at the same time. When Roger wants to go the extra mile for Tao, she always declines his offer, and he then downplays the effort needed and insists, respecting her pride and eventually using his charm to win her over. This type of interaction is rarely seen in a master-servant relationship, more like the sentiment of a grandson trying to woo his grandma to take her bitter medicine. The chemistry between these two actors on screen is stunning, with their emotions buried deeply underneath a cool and laidback surface.

The audience follows Roger as he journeys through the world of nursing homes before he finds one that he figures will provide the best care for Tao, while she interviews applicants hoping to find another maid who will care for Roger as she has. Through these actions,

we get to feel how much these two people really love each other, putting the other person's interests ahead of his or her own needs. An assortment of interesting characters come into play as Tao enters the nursing home and gets to know the nurses and other residents in the home. More elderly issues are brought on as we go from one new face to another. We get to witness abandonment, geriatric sexual desire, behavioral problems and death, all through the interactions of Tao as she learns her new role as a fellow resident, still trying at times to be a caregiver within her limits.

Living in an establishment like a nursing home is difficult as there are lots of unfamiliar obstacles. Yet, unlike mediocre drama that employs "evil" characters as antagonists who create trouble and conflicts, there isn't any "bad" person portrayed in *A Simple Life*. Obstacles exist in the form of threats to survival; a person's illness is antagonistic to life, their spirit and will to live determine how well they handle their stress and get through each day. Emotions swing wildly when you are battling in a life or death situation, but Hui's camera remains tranquil and civil, revealing to the audience only the prelude and the aftermath at certain crucial moments, omitting the unpleasant act itself on screen. This is a masterly decision as Tao has become like a friend to the audience, not just a character on screen, and we like to respect the privacy of a friend at times.

Hui is also celebrated as a director who can bring out the best in her actors. Andy Lau, the highest grossing box office actor in Asia and multiple award winner, is at times criticized as an over the top actor. Hui is able to transform a handsome superstar into a modest working man next door, stripping away his dominating screen presence to share the frame with every other fellow actor. Audiences who are used to seeing Lau in close ups as the camera centres on him will now have to seek him out in the crowd and observe his expressions and subtle body language to sense his emotion. Lau surprises his critics as he refines his performance and excels under the guidance of Hui.

Deanie Ip, who plays the elderly maid Tao, is well-known in Asia. Starting as a husky-voiced pop-jazz singer at the beginning of her career, she crossed over to TV and eventually to film in 1978. She

has played opposite Andy Lau on a few occasions, including her breakout role playing Lau's mother in the TV drama *The Emissary* in 1982. They have become great friends, Lau even referring to her as his godmother. Since then, Ip has delivered a strong body of work and swept up four best supporting actress awards: two Hong Kong Film Awards and another two from the Taiwan Golden Horse before she garnered her latest best actress award in Venice, where she beat out favourites like Kate Winslet, Jodie Foster and Keira Knightley. Ip has always been a character actor and like Lau, was considered by some critics to be too intense in her performance. Hui was able to tone her down, convince her to shed her glamorous look, wipe the makeup off her face, wear out-of-style clothes and re-invent herself as an elderly woman of humble origin and limited support struggling for survival in a nursing home. Ip's subtle nuances capture the audience's heart as we see her gradual decline in health accompanied by her portrayal of frailty through the deterioration of her physicality. Once again, Hui demonstrates her masterly touch in directing actors. Under her direction in twenty-seven films, she has made more than twenty actors award winners, and that is quite an achievement.

Hui's serious attitude to her craft earns her a lot of respect in the Asian film community, causing big stars and producers to join in as cameos in this modest budget production. Among the several best acting award winners playing supporting roles are Anthony Wong Chau Sang, (*Infernal Affairs* – Andrew Lau Wai Keung, Alan Mak 2002), Helen Law Lan (*Bullets Over Summer* – Wilson Yip 1999), Paul Chun Pui (*The Lunatics* – Derek Yee Tung Sing 1986), Hui So Ying (*Ah Ying* – Allen Fong Yuk Ping 1983), Qin Hailu (*Durian Durian* – Fruit Chan 2000), heavy weight directors Sammo Hung, Tsui Hark, and the head of Golden Harvest Production, Mr. Raymond Chow. They all got a kick out of working on *A Simple Life* as it really is a labour of love. The film transports the audience to a better time when people still cared enough to do the right thing and humanity surpassed materialism. The film's calm approach and unobtrusiveness help its audience journey through this rough turmoil of life and death with love, trust and respect, which are rare elements found in films in recent years.



Once Upon a Time in Anatolia

The suspect, Kenan

by FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* shared the Grand Prix at Cannes 2011 with the Dardenne brothers' *The Kid with a Bike* and was highly anticipated by the time it was screened at TIFF. It is a film of great visual beauty and substance, and its length of 157 minutes is entirely justified; nothing is extraneous in its leisurely unfolding of the narrative.

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia is a police procedural, a generic subsection of crime fiction that deals with the details and logistics of criminal investigations. The emphasis is on issues pertaining to process, as opposed, for example, to exposing the killer. The film takes place largely over the span of a long night. A suspect, Kenan (Firat Tanis), has admitted killing an acquaintance in his small town, and is being driven to the countryside where he has promised to reveal where he and another suspect, Ramazan (Burhan Yildiz) buried the body. The group consists of a convoy of three vehicles including the two suspects, the police commissioner Naci (Yilmaz Erdoğan), his driver Arab Ali, a medical examiner / Doctor Cemal (Muhammet Uzuner), a prosecutor Nusrat (Taner Birset) and a few extra men (who will dig up the body, gather evidence etc.). After a few false starts (the murderer is not entirely sure of the location, given the homogeneity of the landscape, the darkness, his state of drunkenness at the time of the killing)

and a short respite at the home of a local Mukhtar, the mayor of a nearby village, the site and body are found and the corpse is collected. The final movement of the film takes place the following day; the suspects are returned to the town to be taken into custody and an autopsy is performed to determine the cause of death.

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia uses its frame of a procedural, its setting of small town life and its structure of a journey through the primordial steppes during the stormy night, to raise questions about human co-existence. Social life is regulated by codes that ensure accountable, moral behaviour. Within the realm of private life, parents are responsible for their children and couples to each other. There are social responsibilities to members of one's community and laws that enforce a system of justice that punishes transgressions. This is the way members of a society respect and protect one another. The film demonstrates that codes cannot always perfectly accommodate human frailties. Life is not clear cut and a certain amount of generosity and empathy is necessary to temper the rigidities of every system.

The opening scene preceding the credits raises the problem of seeing clearly and lucidly. The camera tracks towards a window, and the shot is blurry and obscured. The image comes into focus and reveals the scene behind it - a group of three men are drinking and

eating convivially. The shots following the credits are of the convoy driving through the landscape. It is revealed that one of the three has been killed, and although the murderer has confessed, the question of justice and punishment is more complicated than it appears initially.

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia is a film that emphasizes the long shot; it includes the repeated visualization of the hills and 'monotonous' roads, and the oneiric tone created by the elements to point to the ephemeral nature of human existence. Despite the hierarchies established in the narrative (Nacir defers to the prosecutor, Arab Ali defers to Nacir, etc.) the quest for the body in the steppes reminds the protagonists that everyone is equalized in death. "No one lives forever ... A hundred years from now," the doctor ponders, "not a trace remains...". This perception undercuts the divisions between the men and stresses instead a shared humanity. It also qualifies the illusion of control that accompanies man's egocentric view of the world. The inclusion of shots like the long take of an apple that rolls downstream and meanders until it comes to a stop, suggests a degree of happenstance and arbitrariness that eludes prediction and control.

In the moments where the narrative appears to be in stasis (waiting for the diggers as they search, driving from one location to another, resting at the Mukhtar's) the characters are revealed



Yasar's widow and son

and developed. At first the group behaves as if it is a routine night like many others and is oblivious to Kenan seated amongst them. The absurdity is registered by intermittently intercutting mundane discussions of preferred foods or speculation as to whether the prosecutor might have prostrate problems with shots of the prisoner's highly expressive, tortured and exhausted face. Much of the discussion is taken up by disclosures regarding familial responsibilities. The nervous, high strung police chief receives cell phone calls from his resentful wife, reminding him of his responsibilities to his son who is ill. The doctor is divorced and discloses that he didn't want children, suggesting a possible reason for his estrangement from his wife. The alleged murderer, Kenan, is protective of Ramazan who appears to be mentally handicapped, shutting him up when the latter claims responsibility for the killing. He admits to Nacir, following his hallucination of the dead man Yasar, that the confrontation that led to the murder was instigated when he let slip that the victim's son was really his. Nacir then reports that Kenan has asked him to help care of the boy while he is in jail.

Ultimately, all the main characters adjust their positions and preconceptions, and gain a certain amount of understanding through their shared experience of the night. Kenan's revelations to Nacir follow the remorse he feels and the tears he sheds for the dead man whom he hallucinates seeing at the Mukhtar's. The vision follows the kindnesses he is shown (the doctor giving him a cigarette, his inclusion as an equal at the meal, the Mukhtar's angelic daughter serving him a cup of tea, Ramazan being offered his request for a cola, etc.); he is then willing to admit to Nacir what led up to the murder and to reveal the place of burial. Nacir is touched by Kenan's concern that he will not be able to fulfill his responsibilities to his son; he empathizes and admires the decency underlying the request. The next morning Nacir comes to the doctor's office to pick up the prescription for his son that his wife scolded him for repeatedly forgetting. He admits to the doctor that he does abandon his son and wife by immersing himself in his work, because he can't cope with the reality of his son's illness. When he is alone in his office that morning, the doctor pulls out old photographs of him and his wife,

and his face expresses regret.

The most striking example of the above is that of the prosecutor, who intrigues the doctor by telling him a story of a beautiful woman who mysteriously dies on the day she has predicted, shortly following the birth of a child. When the doctor questions the 'mystery' surrounding the death, and the decision to forego an autopsy which would clarify the cause of death, and offers instead the more practical suggestion of suicide, the prosecutor reveals eventually that the woman was his wife. He adds that they had had a confrontation regarding his fidelity over a minor indiscretion, but that he had assumed that he was forgiven as he thought the incident slight. At the doctor's office the next day he agrees finally that the death probably was a suicide, perpetrated as a form of punishment, but postponed until after the birth of the baby to honour his wife's responsibilities to her unborn child. At first his comment that "women are sometimes very ruthless" seems to suggest an unwillingness to accept responsibility for causing his wife's suffering; however, his evident need to talk about his wife's tragic death and his acknowledgement of his role in

her not so mysterious protest, along with his expression of suffering and loss, suggests his pain. His decision not to request an autopsy, which would be disrespectful to her family and her body, is clearly an influence in the doctor's decision to withhold evidence at the murder victim's autopsy. The doctor modifies his firm commitment to the ethics of scientific evidence that must be upheld at the expense of other moral concerns. The findings of earth in the dead man's windpipe and lungs, suggesting he may have been buried alive, might uselessly exacerbate Kenan's sentence, as well as the suffering of Yasar's widow and son.

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia is a story about a society in transition; Anatolia predates modern Turkey. Some of the group (the professionals like the prosecutor and doctor) are grounded in the secular world, committed to civil law and procedure that will help secure modernity and usher in Turkey's acceptance into the European Union, as is discussed when the men restrain Nacir from physically hitting Kenan and insist he stick to proper conduct and protocol. Both the secular world and the more traditional one are viewed with an equally skeptical eye. At one point, someone suggests that the events of the night will one day provide the substance for a bed-time story, "Once upon a Time in Anatolia...". This bed-time story for present and future generations is a warning against dogmatism that overrides human suffering and privileges a culture of death over life. The Mukhtar is a mayor of an aging, diminished population. He worries about securing funding for a new morgue, a place to hold the bodies of the dead for the relatives who have left the village and need time to travel from Germany and elsewhere for the funeral. One of the men at the meal quips that he should forget the morgue and fix the electricity that is frequently knocked out by the strong winds, implying that he should build a better life for the living instead of glamorizing death. The Mukhtar represents the ideology of a traditional Islamist world. His youngest daughter, Cemile, lit as an angelic, Madonna-like apparition who serves each man tea by candlelight, is trapped in a world rooted in the past that will confirm her burial in domesticity, like her mother, seated by the hearth baking bread. The doctor and prosecutor discuss her plight, commenting, "but what a waste. She'll just

fade away in this God forsaken village". Ironically, the film is no less critical of the treatment of these same issues as they arise in the enlightened world of science and rationalism. The technician at the autopsy begins by making a case for a new morgue like they have in the city, with improved equipment like a rechargeable saw. His attitude towards the body, later emphasized by the graphic sounds of organs and body parts being removed, is entirely practical. The secular world is also insensitive to the oppression of women. Cemile's impressive beauty reminds the prosecutor to continue his story about the beautiful woman who predicts her death. The woman he describes, Nacir's wife who is reduced to a nagging voice on the phone, and the wife of the murder victim who is denied a voice in the paternity fight over her son which renders her vulnerable as a widow, are all as disempowered in the secular world as the women in the Mukhtar's dying village. Like the women, the children also suffer the sins of the fathers. In the scene where Kenan exits the car in the village, Yasar's son, allegedly his own son, in an act of Biblical vengeance, throws a stone that strikes him in the head. The final shots of the film, viewed by the doctor in the midst of conducting the autopsy, are of the boy and his mother, returning home from the morgue, passing by a schoolyard where children are at play. The shots are accompanied by the gruesome sounds of the autopsy (which extend past the end of the film into the credits). Despite the doctor's generosity to Kenan and Yasar's family in withholding the disturbing fact of his possibly having been buried while still alive, the image of his face accidentally sprayed with blood from the procedure, implicates the doctor as well.

The film's imagery of vision that is obscured before being cleared (by rain on the car windshield, or steam in the baths, or the performance of an autopsy) visualizes the process of the narrative and the argument for a more refined, nuanced, understanding of humanity and of thinking progressively. In part the film suggests that stagnation is a product of small town thinking and life. Near the end of the film Nacir suggests the doctor consider leaving the town: "You're still young. I'd pack and clear off". "Where to?" "Wherever. You're a big city boy. It's tough here." In a scene

in a town café, one of the men describes with conviction, the improbable reappearance of Yasar, sighted after his death. Nacir articulates a fatalistic attitude which represents the accepted outlook on suffering. In answer to his wife's question, "Why did God pick on us?" he responds, "There is a reason for everything... If it's meant to be..." The narrative also provides humorous examples of small town attempts to behave professionally, including the body bag that is forgotten and the subsequent problems with transporting the body in the trunk, which is stored finally next to a couple of fresh melons, picked on-site.

The film's title underlines the significance of narrative art to a culture. Stories and films are modern equivalents to the paintings on the rocks and the sculptures lit up during the storm on the steppes. Ceylan's narrative is composed of poetic images that aren't necessarily bound to the plot directly; they often evoke an expressive resonance instead of direct narrative meaning. Shots of clouds crossing the moon, moths beating against a light, a plastic bag that is blown across a road, birds perched in a flock on a rooftop, or a menacing dog barking near the dead man's corpse are all examples of this. In some ways Ceylan's film is reminiscent of aspects of Kiorastami's work, particularly *Where is the Friend's Home?* It shares Kiorastami's careful placement of his protagonists within the landscape, and the protest against rigid, inflexible traditions that oppress and fail to consider human imperfection and vulnerability. Although less self-reflexive than Kiorastami's film, there is a wonderful moment where the prosecutor is finally called to dictate the report of the evidence collected at the gravesite. Enjoying the attention, he comments on the similarities between the deceased and Clark Gable, and then reprimands the stenographer for typing in the joke. He goes on to explain that at university, he was told that he resembled Clark Gable, and the look on his face expresses his vanity and pleasure. It is another of the film's small moments that gives *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* texture and depth, and evidences the filmmaker's aesthetic of humanist art.

Notes

- 1 The word 'monotonous' is used in the press kit to describe the roads in the steppes, which are compared to life in a small town.

Lars Von Trier and *Melancholia*

by RICHARD LIPPE

Melancholia has been referred to in reviews as a science fiction or as a disaster film. While either of these generic designations is applicable, it could also be categorized as a family melodrama. The film is centred on a dysfunctional family who, in addition to their familial problems, are facing the possible extinction of the planet. Earth is in danger of being hit by *Melancholia*, a rogue planet. The film is divided into three sections: Overture, Part One Justine, Part Two Claire. The Overture consists of surrealist imagery that involves Justine/Kirsten Dunst, Claire/Charlotte Gainsbourg and her young son Leo/Cameron Spurr. These elegant and often slow motion shots are beautiful and disturbing and set the tone of the film. As the narrative proper unfolds, some of the images reappear, particularly in Part II.¹ Von Trier's Overture is accompanied by the overture to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (it reappears as the film progresses) which gives the images an elegiac context. For instance, the Overture contains an overhead shot of Dunst wearing a wedding dress and holding a bridal bouquet as she floats in water, surrounded by greenery; the shot and others connect her to nature and death and reinforce the feel of a decadent 19th century Romanticism.

Justine

Part One opens with the newlywed Justine and her husband, Michael/Alexander Skarsgard, in a white stretch limousine that is too big for the narrow and winding driveway leading to John/Kiefer Sutherland and Claire's mansion. The discrepancy between the vehicle and the driveway produces a comical scene that involves both Michael and Justine taking over from the chauffeur, and navigating the car through its impasse. This scene seems to be setting the tone for the narrative to follow; but, on arriving at the house, the tone becomes less relaxed. Justine is met by Claire who is angry that she and Michael are two hours late with the guests still waiting for the reception to begin. Claire

raises the issue of the expense of the wedding and Justine's rudeness. In the sequences to follow, Justine's identity is reflected in her responses to her family, her employer and her husband. Early on, Claire tells Justine that she doesn't want any scenes tonight and that she mustn't further spoil the evening. Justine has already indicated her rejection of the pomposity of the event by demanding that, before partaking in the reception, she must take Michael to the stable and introduce him to her horse Abraham. The film offers no information on their decision to marry and what follows reveals that Justine isn't committed to Michael and that they have nothing in common.

The Justine section is approximately an hour in length and becomes progressively chaotic. The reception officially begins with the best man, Jack/Stellan Skarsgard, introducing himself as Justine's employer and Michael's best friend. He says that he is promoting Justine from copywriter to art director of his advertising agency as a wedding present. He also says that he is presently waiting for her to produce a tagline for the blown up image that is behind him. Jack, dropping his self-serving concerns, introduces Justine's father, Dexter/John Hurt, who is asked to speak. Dexter treats the occasion whimsically, but includes a testy reference to his ex-wife Gaby/Charlotte Rumpling; she, in turn, takes the floor to angrily denounce him, the institution of marriage and the entire evening. Justine's unease is evident and, soon after, she excuses herself from the festivities. She goes outside, gets on a golf cart and drives to one of the eighteen courses on the estate (the source of John's income) where she stops, gets off the cart, hunches down on the ground and stares at the stars in the sky. She looks intently at the sky and begins to urinate. At this point in the narrative, her behaviour isn't explained; but the incident can be read as another instance of Justine acting out her hostility towards the bourgeois rituals of the evening. It also indicates her priorities are elsewhere.

Upon returning to the reception,



Justine, after giving the appearance of enjoying herself, again excuses herself from the reception. She goes to her mother's room and finding her there, says that she is frightened. Gaby tells her that she should get out of the marriage and that everyone is scared. Later, Justine asks her father to stay the night so that they can talk in the morning. While he agrees to do so, he changes his mind, leaving a note that says he was given the opportunity to get a ride home and couldn't resist it.

Justine's abandonment by her parents is countered by her rejection of both Jack and Michael. When Jack confronts her about producing a tagline, which she seems to be trying to do, looking hurriedly through art books in the library (pausing on a Brueghel painting which is seen in close up in the Overture), she turns on him, bitterly denouncing Jack for what he is professionally and personally. Soon after, in an intimate moment with Michael, he takes a paternal attitude and tells her that she will have a contented life as his wife. Justine's response is to abruptly leave and go outside where she meets Tim/Brady Corbet, Jack's young nephew, who has been assigned to tail her to ensure that she delivers the tagline. She aggressively reacts to his presence, pushing him to the ground and initiating sexual inter-



course. When Justine returns to the house, she finds Michael and his parents about to leave. Michael doesn't express anger at her rejection but asks for an explanation to which she replies "...but Michael, what did you expect?"

Part One concludes with the morning after the reception. Claire, after waking Justine who is sleeping on a couch, suggests horseback riding. At the stable, Justine tells Claire that she really tried and Claire's response is "Yes, you did. You really did." The horseback ride abruptly ends when Abraham refuses to leave the estate's grounds. Justine, after dismounting, looks up at the sky and says to herself that the red star (Melancholia) isn't any longer a part of Scorpio, evidencing her awareness of the planet.

In Part One, Von Trier alternates screwball comedy, such as Justine's at times seemingly absurdist behaviour, Gaby's unexpected speech, Claire's husband John's unsuccessful attempts to restore order to the evening's proceedings, with Justine's frequent displays of anxiety and desperation.² The unease this produces is enhanced by his continual use of a hand held camera and editing which further unsettles the narrative's flow. As numerous critics have mentioned and Von Trier himself does in the closing credits by thanking Thomas

Vinterberg, a Dogma 95 colleague, Part One evokes Vinterberg's *The Celebration* (1998) which also uses a bourgeois family ritual to expose the hypocrisy existing beneath surface pretence of care and affection. In Part 1 of *Melancholia* the pretence of happiness produced by money and the nuclear family is juxtaposed to the anger, indifference and contempt that are displayed in the course of the evening.

Claire

Part Two opens with Claire, John and Leo awaiting Justine's return after having been hospitalized because of an acute depression. The film doesn't specify the amount of time that has passed since the evening of the disastrous wedding reception. Justine arrives in a semi-catatonic state and Claire takes on the responsibility of nursing her. We learn that Melancholia has moved much closer and in five days it will either fly by or directly hit the Earth. John, an amateur astronomer and strong believer in science, insists the experts are right in claiming that a collision won't occur. Claire, totally committed to the role of a traditional wife and mother, relies on John's assurances that they will be safe.

While Justine experiences a period in which she is unable to function, she gradually regains strength as the day of

Melancholia's arrival approaches. During this time, Claire increasingly has doubts about John's prediction. She goes to the nearby town and buys poisonous capsules as a measure to protect them from facing the colliding of the two planets.

Part Two focuses on Claire's growing awareness that the Earth will be hit. The last third of *Melancholia* is devoted to the Justine-Claire relationship as John commits suicide by swallowing the poisonous capsules. John's reaction to not facing Melancholia is cowardly and undermines his image of being a caring husband and father. At this point in the narrative, the relationship between the sisters is reversed and it is Justine who takes control. This occurs in a dialogue exchange in which Claire solicits Justine's thoughts on how to face their forthcoming death and the extinction of the planet. Justine responds by saying that acceptance is the answer. She continues "The Earth is evil. We don't need to grieve for it.... I know things, when I say we are alone, we are alone"; the former claim alludes presumably to her perception that human beings are hypocritical and exploit each other; the latter claim of "knowing things" suggests that Justine has supernatural powers.³ In response to Justine's comments, Claire tells Justine they should confront the end of the world by sitting on the terrace,



lighting a candle, drinking champagne and listening to Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Justine answers with "I think it is a piece of shit" to which Claire replies "I just want it to be nice", demonstrating their differing personas.

As *Melancholia* is about the hit the Earth, surrealist images from the Overture begin to appear within the narrative. When rain turns to snow and then hail, Claire grabs Leo and they drive off with the intention of getting to the village. With the electricity off, it's impossible to leave the gated grounds and they are forced to return. Seeing Claire's severe state of panic, Leo becomes frightened. Justine tells him that the way to deal with what's happening is to build a magic cave. They gather branches to build an imaginary cave that has the structure of a tepee. Having constructed it, Justine embraces Claire and brings her into the circle. As they bond holding hands, the soundtrack noise intensifies as the force of *Melancholia* gains momentum. Justine and Leo are secure in their belief of the cave's protection, while Claire, crying, cannot find a means to face their impending death. With the sound of gusting winds and an extraordinary roar, *Melancholia* appears on the horizon. The three are eradicated from the screen by a burst of brilliant light that is followed by silence and black leader.

Melancholia takes place entirely on the estate's grounds and the film is essentially a chamber piece. Like Von Trier's other films it is highly stylized: for instance, Part One uses yellow as being the primary color and Part Two uses the color blue which is aligned to *Melancholia* as it gets closer to the Earth; the grounds surrounding the mansion, are highly manicured and symmetrical, suggesting artifice. *Melancholia* is more

restrained and muted than *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark* but like those films, it is operatic in conception and slowly builds its emotional impact. The operatic effect of *Melancholia* is enhanced by the use of Wagner's music and its emotionalism. Von Trier doesn't encourage viewer identification with either Justine or Claire although he is empathetic to both characters. And while *Melancholia* ends with an epic grandeur, the film remains personal in scale and intimate. There is nothing left but to face death.

Justine's political stance, that civilized society is corrupt, connects the character to that of Von Trier who, like her, suffers from bouts of depression. Von Trier seems to be suggesting it is the melancholic that has the insight to see the world for what it is. His disposition tends toward an expressionistic aesthetic that gaitates to the mystical and death.

Breaking the Waves, *Dancer in the Dark* and *Melancholia* share the concept of two female characters who are opposites in their respective personalities: in the first, Emily Watson, imaginative and romantic, is contrasted to Katrin Cartlidge, her rational sister-in-law; in the second, Björk's self-sacrificing mother exists in relation to Catherine Deneuve's sceptical co-worker and friend; in *Melancholia* Kirsten Dunst's rebelliousness poses a challenge Charlotte Gainsbourg's acquiescence to societal dictates. Yet in each of these films the women bond and make lasting commitments to each other. In addition, the three films feature male protagonist who are weaker than their respective female counterparts. *Europa* and *Dogville* also contain male protagonists who are ineffectual. In *Europa*, Barbara Sukowa, exposed at the end of the film as a Nazi partisan in post-war Germany, when

confronting Jean-Marc Barr, an American-German who doesn't want to become involved, condemns him precisely because he, as he says in self-defence, "didn't do anything." This refusal to act makes Nicole Kidman shoot Paul Bettany herself after her father's gunmen have exterminated the rest of *Dogville*'s townspeople. In *Melancholia*, Justine gains an inner strength by denouncing the hypocrisy of the social world; it gives her the courage to act, like Kidman's character, and she becomes a heroine of a sort.

Melancholia is beautiful in both its conception and realization. Kirsten Dunst deservedly won the Best Actress award at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. While her performance and strong presence carries the film, Charlotte Gainsbourg also deserves recognition for her significant contribution to it. Like his best works, *Melcholica* builds to a highly emotional pitch and leads to an apocalyptic conclusion that is, at once, liberating and horrific.

Notes

- 1 Kirsten Dunst, who with Alexander Skarsgård, Kiefer Sutherland, Udo Kier and Brady Corbet, were present at the film's first public TIFF screening, said that more surrealistic material had been shot and was to be interspersed throughout the film but Von Trier, during editing, decided against this idea. Instead, he selected images that would become an Overture.
- 2 In an interview, *Cineplex Magazine* Volume 121 Number 11, 2011, Kirsten Dunst comments on Von Trier's preparation for the actors: "He had us watch [Ingmar Bergman's] *Persona* and he wanted us to watch *The Philadelphia Story*." John Hurt's character is called Dexter as is Cary Grant in the Cukor film.
- 3 In the on stage TIFF interview Dunst said that Von Trier toyed with the idea that Justine is an alien, perhaps from *Melancholia*. This notion is still present in the scene in which Claire watches Justine bathe nude in the light of *Melancholia*'s blue rays. It also explains her fascination with the red star early on in the film.

CINEMA CITY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

A Box of Balkan Films

By ALISON FRANK

Just north of Belgrade, the Serbian city of Novi Sad is transformed at the beginning of summer. As the linden trees bloom, the smallest breeze scatters blossoms in everyone's hair, and fills the streets with a gentle perfume. In the midday heat, characteristically laid-back citizens gather beneath the sun umbrellas of café terraces, where they sip strong coffee until evening, when cooler air transforms gazes from languid to flirtatious. Finally, when night falls, the city's parks and squares light up with dancing images and haunting sounds of films from all over the world. This is the Cinema City International Film Festival, a celebration designed to turn the whole of Novi Sad into one big cinema.

Before Novi Sad's first modern multiplex opened in January of this year, the festival organisers had to be resourceful in order to screen more than one film at a time. The city's theatres and cultural centres were obvious venues, but as a summer festival, open-air screenings were also an appealing option. Although the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as many regular screenings, now take place at the 'Arena' multiplex in the city centre, the festival remains true to its original concept of a city-wide event. With tickets priced at a modest 150 Serbian dinars (about 2 Canadian dollars), Cinema City is one of the world's more accessible film festivals.

Cinema City is not only designed for the public's benefit: the festival's other main purpose to provide a forum for the nation's talent, giving Serbian directors the opportunity to show their work to

the world. Cinema City's mission to promote domestic filmmaking is reflected in the distribution of its prizes: two thirds of the festival's signature Ibis awards are reserved for Serbian films, which compete in the 'National Class' category. This year's Ibis for Best Film in the National Class went to Nikola Lelečić's coming-of-age skater movie *Tilva Ros* (2010).

The festival still lives up to its international label, as its other two competitive categories ('Exit Point' and 'Up to 10,000 Bucks') are open to films from all over the world. 'Exit Point' showcases independent cinema on to a given theme (this year's theme was 'women'), while 'Up to 10,000 Bucks' is for low-budget (typically short) films. The Ibis for Best Film in the Exit Point category went to Czech director Jan Hřebejk's *Kawasaki's Rose* (2010), while Croatian director Irena Skorić took Best Film in the Up to 10,000 Bucks category with her 10-minute short, 'March 9th'.

The festival also embraces international cinema in its out-of-competition selection. This year there were 14 non-competitive categories, encompassing fiction films and documentaries, shorts and features, new films and retrospectives. The only out-of-competition category devoted solely to domestic talent was an homage to actor Bata Ćivojinović who received a Lifetime Achievement Award for his work in more than 270 films and television series. A number of foreign artists were also honoured with retrospectives: Hungarian master Béla Tarr, who made a guest appearance at the festival; Lithuanian director Sharunas Bartas, who headed the National Class jury; and Polish director Dorota Kędzierzawska, president of the Exit Point jury. Kędzierzawska was presented with an Ibis Award for Contribution to European Cinema, and the festival opened with her most recent film, *Jutro będzie lepiej* (*Tomorrow Will be Better*, 2010).

There are a handful of awards in addition to Cinema City's own Ibis awards, some of which are open to films outside the festival's official competition. Rating films by secret ballot after each screening, the public selects one film from any category to win the Audience Award. This year's Audience Award nevertheless went to a film in the National Class: *Cinema Komunisto* (2010), Mila Turajlić's witty and moving documentary on the former Yugoslavia's film industry. Cinema City also invites two international critics' associations to present their

awards. FIPRESCI and FEDEORA each give one award to a film from the National Class: this year, FIPRESCI chose Miloš Radivojević's *Kako su me ukrali Nemci* (*How I Was Stolen by the Germans*, 2011) while FEDEORA selected Dejan Zečević's *Neprijatelj* (*The Enemy*, 2011). In addition, FIPRESCI awards one film in the Exit Point category: Stephen Frears' *Tamara Drewe* (2010) was this year's winner. Finally, FEDEORA and the Serbian branch of FIPRESCI each present one award to a film from the otherwise non-competitive category 'Balkan Box', which comprised 6 films from Romania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Albania. The remainder of this review will focus on these 6 films which offer a snapshot of trends in contemporary filmmaking in the region.

FEDEORA's award in the Balkan Box category went to *Majki* (*Mothers*, 2010, directed by Milčo Mančevski). The film is divided into three sections, each of which could easily stand alone as a *court* or *moyen métrage*. In the first section, a couple of schoolgirls see a flasher near the playground. As they are too scared to go to the police, two of their friends act as eyewitnesses on their behalf, which leads to predictable difficulties when it comes to identifying a suspect. The film's second section concerns a group of young urban filmmakers who set out to make a documentary about Macedonia's dying village life. They find a more extreme example than they could have dreamed of: a community that has been reduced to one elderly goatherd and a sister whom he refuses to acknowledge, believing that she brings bad luck. The final section of the film recounts the true story of a serial rapist and murderer in a small town: it begins with the stories of the victims, all elderly female cleaning women, and ends with the story of the man who killed them.

Majki deserves its award for being masterfully directed and well-written: it develops strong emotional intimacy with characters that feel authentic. What makes this film stand out most, though, is its daring combination of fiction and documentary: after two sections that are clearly fictional, the film switches to documentary mode in its final section, complete with talking-head interviews and newspaper clippings. Even though the film's second section incorporates the idea of documentary, this does

nothing to prepare the audience for the switch. Surprisingly, the effect is refreshing rather than jarring. *Majki* does suffer from a fundamental lack of unity at its core, but this is due to the starkly differing duration of the three sections (the first being quite short, and the last quite long). The film's title theme acts as a very weak unifying concept, since the first two sections have very little to do with 'mothers'.

There were far more serious problems with *The Show Must Go On* (2010, directed by Nevio Marasović), which received the award of the Serbian branch of FIPRESCI. Set in Zagreb in the near future, the film centres on a broadcasting company producing 'Housed', a programme based on the Big Brother reality TV series. When world war threatens the future of humanity, the studio executives decide that the show's participants should remain ignorant of events in the outside world: protected in their underground bunker, the housemates may end up being the only humans left on earth.

While FIPRESCI found *The Show Must Go On* 'coherent and convincing',¹ the audience at the screening this reviewer attended were laughing openly at the most serious moments. Creating a credible picture of the future is always a challenge, and although the film did well in the special effects department (which ought to be the biggest challenge for a film without a Hollywood budget), on the level of human emotion the film fell completely flat. The characters were irritatingly stereotyped, more suited to farce or cheap television drama, and this made it impossible to care about their fate.

The Serbian branch of FIPRESCI made a far better choice in their 'Special Mention', which went to Adis Bakrać's *Ostavljeni* (*The Abandoned*, 2010). In an admirably restricted duration of just 85 minutes, this relatively overlooked fiction film presents a convincing, complex and touching portrait of life in a Bosnian orphanage. It weaves three main problems into one compelling narrative. First, some orphans are the children of wartime rape campaigns: one of them, Alen, is now a teenager, and wants to meet his parents, believing that they are world affairs journalists. The second problem is that the orphanage is short of money: this means that they must accept donations from a shady benefactor, who uses some of the orphans (Alen

among them) to run his criminal errands. Finally, there is the question of the orphanage's leadership, as a new director has arrived, bringing with him more liberal ideas: both he and the orphanage's mother figure have secrets which tie their stories to Alen's.

Ostavljeni is important because it uses fiction to draw attention to a real-life issue: namely, the emotional impact for a child of being unwanted, and how to secure a more positive future for such children. Cinematically, *Ostavljeni* is notable for its original approach to narrative: the director avoids conventional developments so naturally that one would almost think he was not familiar with them. Bakrać clearly has a strong grip of narrative principles, though, as the film is well-unified: its developments, though arguably abrupt, only ever create a moment's confusion, at most. While maintaining its narrative momentum, the film creates a stimulating sense of spontaneity as it hops from one event to the next, hiding its pattern and thus mirroring real life.

Marian Criflan's *Morgen* (*Tomorrow*) also uses fiction to examine a real-life problem, in this case illegal migrants. Set in Romania near the border with Hungary, the film centres on Nelu, a Romanian man, and his relationship with a Turkish migrant desperate to reach his family in Germany. The film's approach is refreshing in relation to familiar Western attitudes to illegal immigration, which tend to fall into one of two extremes: pity, which turns the migrant into a martyr, and condemnation, which sees the migrant as part of a faceless tidal wave that must be stopped. While the contrasting attitudes of Nelu and the Romanian border police towards the Turkish migrant are comparable to those in the West, neither is so extreme. The border police have no particular ideological opposition to illegal immigration: as long as they are no longer responsible for him, they are happy to see the Turkish man move on to another EU country. Nelu, meanwhile, does not see himself as a humanitarian: as far as he is concerned, if you meet a fellow man in need, it is only natural to give him food, clothing and shelter. To Nelu, rules become illegitimate when they act as a barrier to a natural human desire, such as being near loved ones.

Although from Nelu's perspective his actions are natural rather than noble, as

a spectator you are forced to ask yourself if you would act in the same way. When he first approaches Nelu, the migrant yammers disconcertingly in a language Nelu can't understand (apart from the word 'Almanya', Germany). Here, the audience is placed in the same position as Nelu, as there are no subtleties to translate what the Turkish man is saying. After an initial feeling of alienation from the migrant and his annoyingly insistent chatter, the audience will eventually come to adopt Nelu's view of him. Nelu keeps promising the migrant that 'tomorrow' he will help him to go to Germany (hence the film's title), so the Turkish man patiently waits but, equally feeling a natural obligation, begins to take part in daily life on the farm, chopping wood and fixing the roof. In this way, the migrant becomes a calm, familiar, and endearing presence. Like Nelu, the audience finally sees the migrant as a human being first and foremost: his illegal status is now a troublesome detail rather than his defining feature. The film's slow pace and contemplative shots are arguably appropriate to the film's gentle, philosophical approach. Unfortunately, the copy of the film screened at Cinema City may have been a poor one, as the image could be dark, completely black at times, making some of the film's long takes very boring.

Ballkan Pazar (*Balkan Bazaar*, 2010, directed by Edmond Budina) also treats an ostensibly serious theme, based on real events. It concerns a French woman, Jolie, and her Italian-born daughter, Orsola, who set out to retrieve the bones of Jolie's dead father, which have mysteriously ended up in Albania. Their search leads to a village where the local priest is involved in illicit bone-trading deals with a rich Greek expatriate. By passing off Albanian bones as the remains of Greek soldiers from World War II, the Greek man intends to annex Albanian territory to Greece, basing his claim on the ancient belief that land belongs to the soldiers who die on it.

For a film treating such sensitive topics as human remains and national borders, *Balkan Pazar* takes an incongruously farcical approach. While not particularly funny, the film does have a charming energy in its underhanded plots, superstitious rituals, madcap chases, romantic flings and cultural misunderstandings. Although the sets are clearly



Apnoia

low-budget, the image is bathed with a golden glow that radiates Southeast Europe, making the film visually pleasing. In terms of narrative, though, in spite of an interesting premise the film soon loses its way: it becomes unclear whether it is the father's bones, the village's nationality, or official corruption that is of most concern, and introducing romance only confuses matters further.

There was also a strange incongruity in the final Balkan Box film, *Apnoia* (*Apnea*) 2010. The film revolves around Dimitris, a competitive swimmer with a particular talent for holding his breath underwater. He falls in love with Elsa, who needs to improve her swimming skills for her work as an environmental activist. Their relationship falters when Dimitris refuses to help with her campaigning. As a result, he is not there when Elsa goes missing on a seaside trip with her fellow activists.

Director Ari Bafalouka is himself a record-holding swimming champion, and his intimate familiarity with the sport shines through in the script's level of detail (Dimitris' advice to Elsa on technique, for example, or the stress of sponsorship deals). An expert's perspective is also evident in the aesthetic approach to the many scenes set in the water. The film leaves a strangely cold impression, though, all the more strange given that it has a romantic relationship at its centre. Yioulika Skafida brings an engaging

gentleness to her portrayal of Elsa, but Sotiris Pastras as Dimitris has about as much warmth as a Greek statue. In both cases, though, the audience remains acutely aware that they are actors reciting their lines: this is a film that never passes that threshold of disbelief, where the audience begins to feel that they are watching real characters in real situations. Rather than a problem with the performance, this sense of artificiality points to poor character development and motivation, and a lack of emotional authenticity in the script.

In terms of theme, films in the Balkan Box category treated topics of particular relevance to the region (war, emigration, corruption, transitional economies), typically in a way that gave them broader relevance. Another notable theme shared by several films was problematic relationships with wives and mothers: Nelu's wife's lack of sympathy for the illegal immigrant in *Morgen*; the TV executive's perpetually angry ex-wife in *The Show Must Go On*; the apparent betrayals by Alen's mother and the orphanage's mother figure in *Ostavljeni*. Most shocking of all were the offhand criticisms of the victims in *Majki*'s documentary section, all respectable widows and beloved mothers who nonetheless had 'something whorish about them' in the opinion of one police representative; their murderer, meanwhile, was portrayed as a man damaged by his own

mother's licentious behaviour when he was a child.

There were very few strong or even positive female characters, mothers or otherwise, in these films. The women of the farcical *Balkan Pazar* were assertive, but easily seduced, and thereby easily distracted from their mission. *Apnea*'s Elsa, meanwhile, though an activist, came across as vulnerable, and demonstrably in need of father's or boyfriend's protection. The old stereotypes of women as weak or defined by their sexuality seem more easily acceptable when compared with even less flattering characterisations in *Majki* and *Ostavljeni*, however. By showing women to be at least as bad as men, do the films attempt a more equal redistribution of blame for society's problems? Does this liberate women from the reductive stereotype of virgin/mother, or does it merely emphasise the other reductive stereotype of whore, and thus signify a deeper current of misogyny? These may be questions for further study. The awards that Cinema City and the critics' juries gave to some of the films discussed here will help to ensure that the best of this year's Balkan cinema makes further appearances at international film festivals over the coming year; one or two may find international distributors and make it to local arts cinemas around the world, and a larger number should become available for study on DVD in the near future.

Note

- 1 Serbian branch of FIPRESCI's explanation of their choice, available at <<http://eng.cinemacity.org/cinema-city-finale-and-awards.562.htm>> viewed 4 July 2011.

Looking at Estonia with New Eyes

By ALISON FRANK

The Riga International Film Festival 'Arsenals' takes place every September, and its Baltic Film Competition showcases the best new shorts, fiction features and documentaries from the region. In the festival's 2011 edition, Estonian director Katrin Laur dominated the awards with her Graveyard Keeper's Daughter (Surnuaivahi tütar, 2011), receiving the Diploma of Honour from the Baltic Film Competition Jury, as well as the FIPRESCI Prize for the category. The film centres on a little girl named Lucia and her neglectful parents, Kaido and Maria. Lucia's new teacher thinks that she would better off in foster care, and this threat hangs over the family, already troubled by unemployment and alcoholism. When Lucia's father finds temporary work in Finland, the whole family goes with him. There, they lodge with Sirpa, a female pastor who introduces Lucia to a calmer way of life. But this is a film which acknowledges that there are rarely simple solutions to family problems. Following the screening of Graveyard Keeper's Daughter at Riga's K.Suns cinema, Katrin Laur spoke to Alison Frank.

Alison Frank: How did you choose this particular story?

Katrin Laur: Rather than authors choosing stories for films, I have a feeling that stories choose authors. I honestly believe this. I dreamed of this story one night—it's the first time this has happened in my life. I don't tend to be esoteric: I'm just a normal down-to-earth person. Of course, you can't see 100 pages of a script in a dream: these things don't happen, alas. But I did see the beginning of the film: children playing and hiding in a graveyard.

AF: The opening presents a strange juxtaposition. The graveyard is obviously associated with death: Lucia's father Kaido is actually digging graves. But it also comes across as

idyllic: a natural setting on a sunny day, and the children playing happily.

KL: I love graveyards myself. I like walking in graveyards and reading the names and dates, so I don't see it as a horrifying setting for the film. Maybe everything in this film has two faces. A graveyard is connected with death but it's also a good peaceful playground for children.

AF: As the opening of the film came to you in a dream, the idea of double meanings seems fitting. Did you intend the rest of the film to be symbolic?

KL: I'm not much of a person for symbols. I really think that film lives on details: I focus intensively on these, and I believe that this influences the viewer. In terms of symbolism, I confess that the three children in the film, Lucia, Jacintha and Francisco, were named after the children who saw Holy Mary in Fatima, Portugal at the beginning of the 20th century. Holy Mary showed herself several times to these very simple children and told them things they couldn't have known. A wonder always takes place when children are around, and we need miracles to happen. So the children's names are a sort of symbol for a miracle. But I don't push it, as you see: I don't think it's important for everybody to read it and say 'ah ha! Now I have it!'

AF: The film draws attention to serious social problems. Did you also have a social message in mind when you made this film?

KL: The film is sociologically rooted to some extent. It is the way I see Estonian contemporary society: its moral, mental and material orientation. I had been living in Germany for a very long time—practically my whole adult life. I came back to Estonia in 2005, so modern day Estonia is to a strong extent a new country for me. On the other hand, I think that I'm a socially alert person in

all countries. What I am interested in is the portrait of man against the background of history or the contemporary situation. The relationship between man and society has always been important for me.

AF: You have said that you want people to relate to the film first of all on an emotional level. Why is this so important to you?

KL: To a certain extent, the material for this film was the way people relate to each other, what they consider important, how they express their feelings, and what feelings they do allow themselves at all. I really wanted to provoke people. I thought that if I tell this story through the eyes of a child, it will make it very difficult for the viewer to step back and consider the story from an intellectual point of view. Children force us to become emotionally involved.

AF: The programme guide's summary of your film said that the family's stay with Sirpa, the pastor, would change their lives. This made me expect a clear-cut tale of the model citizen helping the wayward family. I was completely shocked when Sirpa ended up getting drunk with Maria, dancing to loud music and rolling on the floor laughing.

KL: People have so many sides to their character. Sirpa is not somebody who stands above life, giving advice to everybody. This woman also has moments which hurt, seriously hurt. Everybody has a problem.

AF: Maybe it is because they are so complex that it is easy to sympathise with all the characters. That said, Lucia's new teacher could be cold and distant: although her intentions were good, she seemed to lack compassion.

KL: I didn't want to make her that bad. The reality is, teachers and child protection workers have to stand up for children. It doesn't mean that they don't get involved: they have to get involved, and there is always the possibility that the situation won't turn out well.

AF: The film does emphasise that element of uncertainty. Should the authorities act fast to remove Lucia from a hazardous home? Or should they do all they can to keep the family together?

KL: There are no absolutely right or



Gravard Keeper's Daughter

wrong choices in these circumstances, or not usually. Of course, sometimes the right answer is clear, because bad parents are much worse than Maria and Kaido—they are violent. In this film, I wanted to show that Lucia's parents were bad, but not violent or cruel.

AF: When the family stays with Sirpa, Maria and Lucia hear her Sunday sermon about the fig tree that initially fails to grow. Did you intend this sermon to be addressed to the family, and was it a message about second chances?

KL: It was meant to be addressed to Maria. For Lucia, everything is new. Sirpa's sermon about the fig tree is a quotation from the Bible that says that God is most happy about every sinner who becomes a little bit better. It's not about people who are good already.

AF: How did you cast Lucia?

KL: I like to find the sincerity in children. I look for those who don't want to please...or at least don't show it. I found Kertu-Killu Grenman at a countryside school in a small village, and I chose her to play Lucia because she was cool and tough like Pippi Longstocking. She didn't seem to be saying, 'Take me! I will do anything to get this role!' She was nice, she was lively, and two years later she had grown only 1cm. Not to say that she is extremely small—this is just how it happened. She still fit the role perfectly, and I decided that you have to be grateful when things turn out so well. I don't start casting over the whole country if my heart tells me that I have found the girl who is perfect for the role.

AF: What about Lucia's best friend, Jacinta? Were there particular challenges in casting a child with Down's syndrome?

KL: There are not so many children with

Down's syndrome in Estonia, as it is such a small country. We found her in an orphanage and she was extremely happy to work. She would tell everybody at the breakfast table: 'Go to work, go to work, we all have to go to work!' I think it was a really good experience for her, and for all the other people involved in the production. Estonian society, like all post-socialist societies, has mixed feelings about disabled people. During socialism, it would have taken so much additional investment to deal with them. It was a cruel society: it wasn't a good one which somehow drowned. Until recently, the disabled were just kept out of sight, so people have not been accustomed to dealing with them. Some colleagues were a bit afraid before we began. They said, 'You know, I don't have experience...' But they all got experience, and they are very happy about it.

But some people were also angry with me. Not that they could tell me—they know that these things cannot be said openly. But I presume that some of the people who strongly disliked the film were angry with me for having made them look at a disabled person for such a long time. I didn't want to make any special point with this, but it is life: deal with life, please! You cannot just close one eye all the time.

AF: There was a sense in the film of Finland as a land of promise. Can you speak a bit about the Finnish-Estonian relationship?

KL: For me it's not a question of Finnish-Estonian relationships but of a totally different society. Finland never had this human experiment called socialism. Finland is a rich neighbour for Estonians, where they can go and work and earn some money.

Some people said that I idealise Finland—by no means do I. I don't know Finland, and I don't adore Finland

from what I know of it. I just wanted these extremely simple people to be put into an environment which forces them to see things with new eyes.

Estonian and Finnish are such close languages, closer than Spanish and Italian. Even the simplest Estonians are able quickly to learn Finnish—or they already know it to some extent because of Finnish TV (which everybody was watching in Soviet times, as it was possible to watch TV without censorship).

I chose Finland because the family needed to be in a different environment, but one where they could still understand something. If I taken them to England or France it would have been so different that they wouldn't have understood anything: they would have come back home without any traces of their visit.

But the idea of simple solutions is a bit stupid: that the family could take a ship and get away from all their problems. Things don't happen like this. Ships don't take us away from ourselves.

AF: Finally, I'd like to ask you about the cinematography. There are a lot of low-angle shots in the film: was that intended to emphasise the child's point of view?

KL: I think it does have something to do with the child's point of view, because children look differently. It's also part of the film's whole visual style. The cameraman, Anssi Leino, was Finnish, and very young: this was his first feature film. I wanted someone who hadn't been looking at Estonia and filming it all his life. I hoped that he would bring a fresher view, and I think he did. But in human terms it was difficult for such a young cameraman to be DOP for a long period. The job is demanding on the nerves: imagine, you have children, you have a disabled child... It is not such a controlled situation: you can't just say, 'everybody get ready and perform!'

REYKJAVIK INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Andrea Segre

CONFRONTING DIFFERENCE

By ALISON FRANK

*Italian director Andrea Segre has established himself as a documentary filmmaker with a focus on migrants from developing countries: he looks in particular at immigrants to Italy and the largely negative reception they receive. Segre's latest film, *Li and the Poet* (Io Sono Li, 2011) is his first fiction feature, but it maintains a link to his past work as it is based on a true story of a Chinese immigrant to Italy. Zhao Tao stars as Shun Li, the immigrant who must work for local Chinese bosses to pay off her passage to Italy: she is sent to work in a fishermen's wine bar just outside Venice. The poet, Bepi, is played by veteran Croatian actor Rade Serbedzija: having immigrated to Italy himself long ago, Bepi is the only local who sympathises with Shun Li. Both the Italian and Chinese communities feel threatened by this cross-cultural friendship, however, and do all they can to separate Shun Li and Bepi.*

*I spoke to Segre at the Reykjavik International Film Festival, where *Li and the Poet* received a special mention from the main jury.*

Alison Frank: In addition to being a film director, you hold a PhD in Sociology of Communication. Can you explain how your research interests informed the focus of your filmmaking?

Andre Segre: It was strange: until about four years ago, my academic research and my documentary filmmaking were intertwined. I never studied cinema or directing: the sole purpose of my documentaries was to further my sociological research, and for the sake of some special international co-operation projects. I was working with cultural cen-

tres in small villages in Eastern Europe and North Africa, making video documentaries to help the people there. Then, I made a documentary called *Like a Man on Earth* [*Come un uomo sulla terra*, 2008], about the agreements between Libya and Italy to stop African migrants coming to Lampedusa. This documentary was very successful in Italy: it was shown widely, and won a lot of prizes. This made me believe that I could become a director. I dreamed of making this film, *Li and the Poet*. I wrote the treatment, and sent it to the New Cinema Network, the project section of the Rome International Film Festival. I won first prize, which allowed me to start making the film.

I sometimes give lessons or workshops at the university, but I'm no longer following an academic career. Of course, all my research in sociology has had a big influence on my cinema. Migration and the relationship between Europe and external countries was always my focus, both in sociology and cinema.

AF: Are you also influenced by your personal experiences with immigrants and other cultures?

AS: When I was very young, between the ages of 19 and 21, I developed a great love of travel: in particular, travelling in the opposite direction of people trying to come to Europe. We call it 'Fortress Europe', which means Europe enclosed by a wall to keep migrants out. I really hate the fact that the world is divided between people who can travel and people who can't. When you're about 20-25 years old (and that's the average age of most migrants coming to Italy), you need to travel, to go away from your home, and discover the world. But there are so many young people who can't do it.

I'm curious to discover more about the countries from which so many migrants come: so, for example, in 2004 I travelled to Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali. Other times, I've met migrants in Italy, and travelled with them back to their home countries for a visit. This was the case when I worked with two young directors from Albania, about eleven years ago: we made a small documentary called *A Metà* [*Halfway*], about people coming from Albania to Italy, and Albanians living in Italy.

AF: Can you share some of the background to *Li and the Poet*?

AS: The story was based on reality. It is set in Chioggia, a village I know quite well: my mother was born there. I also knew the village wine bar very well when I was younger, and about five years ago, the traditional barwoman was suddenly replaced by a Chinese woman. Sociologically, the barwoman plays a really important role in the traditional fishermen's wine bar. For many of the men drinking there, the wine bar is like a second home (or sometimes a first home!). The person working at the bar is usually a woman, and all the people drinking there are men. She knows them very well, and this relationship is a strong one—it's not erotic, but it's a very important relationship. When a Chinese woman took over as barwoman, it completely changed the balance inside the wine bar. I loved that fact, and tried to meet the Chinese woman, and understand her experience. At that time, I was working towards my PhD in the Department of Sociology. Some of my colleagues were working on the Chinese community so I tried to learn a little from their studies. For the past eight years, I've been living in an area of Rome where there are a lot of Chinese people. The first part of the film, when Shun Li is working in a sweatshop, is based in this area. All of these experiences were important to build the project.

AF: Do you feel that your film reflects the general level of xenophobia in Italy? If so, why do you think there is such a fear of foreigners?

AS: Italy has become an immigration country over the last ten years, and continues to be an emigration country. We're a still a little bit confused about our role in the world. This situation has increased xenophobia in the country a lot. Some political parties also try to increase the fear of immigrants. But this happens not only in Italy but all around Europe. What is strange in Italy is that in the same bar, like in our bar in the film, you can have an Italian who emigrated to Germany facing a Chinese person who immigrated to Italy, and at first they can't compare their experiences—that's a pity. If you compare your experiences, and understand that she's a stranger as you were a stranger, that can help the country to avoid racism and xenophobia.

AF: But in your film, Bepi is the only one who talks with Shun Li and finds

out that her father is a fisherman, like all the men in the bar.

AS: For me, the film is a metaphor about confronting difference. Of course, it's difficult to understand difference—that's natural. It takes a certain inner courage to face difference and, but if you can do it, and learn something about yourself by confronting this difference, then you will be richer for it. But the film presents a community of fishermen, not intellectuals: obviously, the first time they are faced with a difference, it creates a problem for their identity. The Chinese woman herself is not the problem. It is a problem of identity: 'if there is a Chinese woman on the bar, then who am I? Am I still the same man I was when there was an Italian woman there, or do I have to change?' That's the problem for all the men in the bar. Instead of trying to understand how they can change, together with Shun Li, they close the door on this difficult path and transform the situation into one of fear. Bepi has the courage to put his identity in crisis. Of course, this issue is not unique to this bar in Chioggia: it's a global issue.

AF: Can you talk a little about the casting?

AS: Zhao Tao, the Chinese actress, is quite famous internationally: she was in *Still Life*, which won the Golden Lion in 2006, and is the main actress for Jia Zhangke, one of the most important Chinese directors now. Rade Serbedzija is, of course, very famous. When I was thinking about the two main characters, I was sure that they had to be Zhao Tao and Rade Serbedzija. There was no doubt in my mind. So, I simply wrote to them, and both replied and said that they agreed that the roles were right for them. Zhao Tao was looking for an opportunity to make a film with an international director. She loved the relation between the character and her own experience: for her first film outside China, she would play the character of an immigrant. In Rade's reply, he said, 'how did you know that I am a fisherman?' I'd had no idea. Their personal feelings were really helpful, not just because they decided to take on the roles, but because they accepted lower salaries than usual.

There are three Italian actors in the film who are quite famous in Italy, though not on the international market. About six characters in the film are

played by non-professional actors. I loved mixing these three kinds of actors: international stars, famous Italian actors, and normal people.

AF: Did you find it difficult to write your first fiction script?

AS: I collaborated with Marco Pettenello, a young screenwriter. I love to write, so writing the script was really fun—not difficult at all. What was more difficult was making the actors bring these characters to life. In documentary, you do the opposite: you take real people and somehow transform them into actors. I base my documentaries on my relationship with the protagonists: they are real people, they speak in the first person and they become protagonists in a story. They are very important, not simply witnesses like in television reportage. Of course when a real person is in a film, speaking in front of the camera, he changes a lot. I always try to understand whether this change is helping the film or not. For a fiction film, I had to work in the opposite direction: how to make actors feel that they are playing real people.

AF: Shun Li's roommate, Li Yan, is a mysterious character. How, and why, does she pay Shun Li's debt for her?

AS: Li Yan is a very strange character. In the first draft of the script, she was a prostitute who worked somewhere else, but lived in the same quarters as Shun Li and was controlled by the same boss. Then I felt that I didn't want to reproduce a sociological stereotype of the Chinese prostitute controlled by a mafia boss—it would be racist somehow. At the same time, I felt that I needed to keep Li Yan in the film, because it was useful for Shun Li to have a good friend staying in the same room. My experience of migrants' communities is that female solidarity is very strong, and important, in the experience of immigration. I kept Li Yan in the film because I wanted to pay tribute to this female solidarity within the migrant community. With the co-screenwriter, Marco, I created this mysterious character: you don't know what Li Yan does, and how and why she pays Shun Li's debt. I love not being sure about what really happened: it's a mystery not just for the spectators but for myself.

AF: Why did you decide to show Li Yan doing tai chi on the beach?

AS: From a photographic point of view, I tried to find some Chinese atmosphere in the Venice lagoon. I wanted to take my lagoon, a place that I know very well, and observe and portray it from another point of view, a distant perspective that was very different from mine. I thought that I myself should take up the opportunity and challenge of confronting and understanding difference. Tai chi on the beach was one part of this challenge. From a narrative or structural point of view, tai chi has another role in the film. For me, Li Yan is like an alter ego for Shun Li: a strong part of Shun Li who helps her to go on. For this reason, I tried to place the tai chi scenes at three difficult moments in Shun Li's story: it's like this tai chi gives her the energy to face these moments.

AF: Do you expect your first fiction film to have the same impact as your documentaries?

AS: I think that a fiction film can have more impact than a documentary. People always think that a documentary is not a real film. A documentary is a small film: you don't get theatrical distribution, you don't have actors, and you don't have the same visibility as fiction films at festivals. But I will simply go on telling stories about silences and differences, and hope that people will be interested in them.

AF: What has the reaction been like so far to *Li and the Poet*?

AS: The reaction in Italy, at the Venice Film Festival, and from critics, has been very good so far. We are now distributing it to cinemas in Italy: it's not a big distribution but it's going well.

AF: Are you going to continue to make fiction films, or will you return to documentary?

AS: Right now I'm producing a documentary and writing a fiction film, so I will go on with both. The documentary is related to the one I mentioned earlier, *Like a Man on Earth*: the story of migrants coming from Libya to Italy, in particular Italy and Libya's strategy, from 2009–2010, to push migrants back. If they met a boat in the middle of the sea with migrants trying to flee from Libya, they pushed the boat back. Nobody knows what really happened to that boat but we met some witnesses of that and we are working on it.



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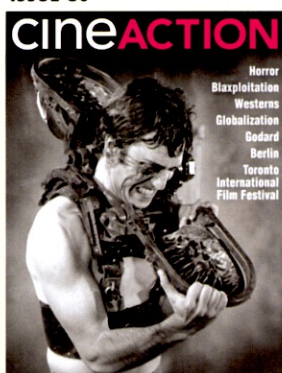
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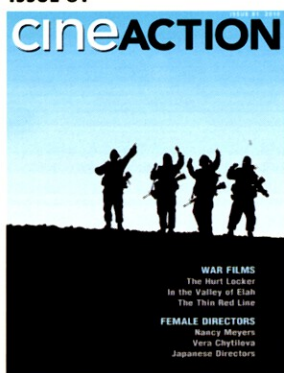
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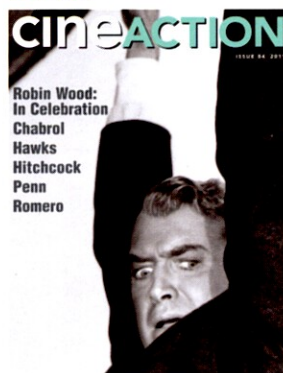
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